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MY STORY.

GERTRUDE'S PREFACE.

I HAVE been told that, if I put together all I can remember of my life, it will be found interesting reading.

I can hardly believe this, but Life has taught me that I am not the best judge in matters that affect me personally, and therefore I yield my opinion in this one—only I must tell my story in my own way—sometimes like a bright flash among much that is half forgotten—sometimes drawn from what is so painfully burned into memory that it will read as if I had learned it by heart before I set it down—sometimes by bits taken from the journal in which I used to write my foolish thoughts and hopes. I am not a well-read scholar. I have no power to reduce these fragments of a life into a smooth, well-digested narrative. I have been bid tell my Story, and I will do the best I can, and begin at the point which decided my fate.

CHAPTER I.

ON BOARD THE ADELAIDE.

THE sea had been very rough, but it was quieter now, and I fancied my mother slept at last. I turned down the lamp.

I had been watching beside her all night, and I felt tired, but I could not leave my mother; so I got up and leaned against the door of our little cabin.

How still she lay after her long night of anguish, and how tall she looked! I shuddered. Her figure, showing vaguely under the bedclothes, reminded me of a recumbent marble effigy on a tomb.

I, too, was tall, but my mother looked as I fancy a queen should look. She had that fair, aquiline face which seems born to command. I am dark-eyed and dark-haired, and have a gypsy face rather than a royal one.

I stood against the door till I was half asleep. Suddenly I started at the sound of a voice.

"I think some one ought to tell Miss Stewart."

The waves were dashing furiously against the ship; but, through all the noise they made, the words came to me distinctly, and then this answer:

"Tell her yourself then, doctor, I can't."

The voices told me that Captain Brand and Dr. Maxse were standing just outside my mother's cabin. The door was shut fast, but there were wide cracks, and as I leaned against it I heard every word.

I knew that my mother was dangerously ill, but these words added a sudden horror to my anxiety. I knew at once what it was that Dr. Maxse feared and wished to tell me; but I would not believe him. How could a mere ship's doctor decide about my mother's life?

I came out of the cabin and closed the door, and then I went up to Dr. Maxse.

I turned my back on Captain Brand. Even then I was shy of him—even at the moment when it might have been thought I had only room for the one overmastering dread.

I did not dislike Captain Brand, but I feared him—he was so big, so rough-looking, and so silent.

"Do you mean that my mother is dying, Dr. Maxse?"

There was not much light, but I could make out the look of surprise in the doctor's face. He was a small man, with a soft temper, and a fair, downy beard. A man I felt

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at ease with, and yet a man in whom I felt no refuge, no support against the terror that threatened me. At the dumb wonder in Dr. Maxse's face a vehement anger came to me.

But, before I had got out in words the passion that throbbed in my throat and quivered in my nostrils, Captain Brand's large, hard hand had taken mine gently but firmly —he drew me round so as to face him. I looked up and I was surprised. Captain Brand had always seemed so indifferent—I could almost say so harsh—toward me. I had got the idea from his silence that he disapproved of my wild, independent ways, and would have liked to treat me as a child. Now he looked quite changed; there was a tenderness in his blue eyes, as if the brightness were softened by tears.

"Can I do any thing for her?"

Captain Brand's voice sounded hoarse and unsteady; for an instant I could have clung to him for help against this terrible grief, and then came the cold certainty—if this brave, steadfast man gave up hope, then the words I had said in defiance, more than in reality, were the truth. My mother was dying—and yet—I had left the cabin in better hope, her breathing had seemed easier than it had been for some hours.

I could not answer—I must have stood still some minutes, for Captain Brand moved toward the cabin-door before I recovered from the look he had given me.

"May I go in?" He said this, but he did not wait for my leave. I found myself following him to my mother's bedside.

Her look rested on him as he moved up to the lamp which had grown dim.

The bright light fell once more on her face, and then I saw the change there.

Dr. Maxse had spoken the truth.

"O mother, mother!" I was little more than sixteen—the words came out against my will—and then I threw myself on my knees, and hid my face on a chair close beside the bed.

When I looked up again, Captain Brand was holding my mother's delicate, wasted hand in his strong brown fingers.

I was full of anguish, and yet there was room in my heart for pride.

What a degradation for my mother, so well born and gently bred, the wife, too, of my fastidious and aristocratic father, in her dying moments to have no one for a friend and comforter, no one to hold her hand and give her sympathy but this rough captain of a merchant-ship! He was good and kind, and now he seemed tender, but he was only a sailor for all that.

"What will become of my Gertrude?" Her voice was so very weak that I could hardly hear it. Could all this be real? was I awake, and was my mother talking of herself as gone from me?—actually talking about me to a person like Captain Brand?

He leaned over her as he answered:

"Do not distress yourself; I pledge myself to take every care of her. When we reach England, I will take her to her friends myself."

I still knelt, looking at my mother; it seemed to me that this talk only exhausted her, and kept me from my place beside her. What could it matter what became of me, when she was going away forever? If I had not feared to vex her, I should have told Captain Brand to go.

I saw her shake her head in answer to him, but, oh, how feebly!

"No friends"—she gasped between the words—"they have to be reconciled first; only I could do that."

Then came silence; I could not bear it, she might be dying now. I rose up, and moved softly to the side of Captain Brand.

"O my Gertrude, my darling, what will become of her, left alone, so young, so friendless!"—this came in a stronger, less broken voice; but I stood still, frightened. I did not dare to speak.

Captain Brand turned suddenly from the bed; he began to walk up and down my mother's cabin as if he were on deck, his chin sunk on his chest, and his hands clasped behind him.

I longed so that he would go away. I could not hang over or kiss my mother with this great strange man close by; he seemed to freeze up all my feelings; what was the use of his staying when he could not comfort her?

I cleared my throat with an effort to speak to him as if I were not afraid:

"Will you go away, please? I want to be alone with mamma."

He seemed not to have heard me.

"Will you go up and fetch Dr. Maxse?" he spoke very gently; and then an ashamed look came on his broad face. "I want to

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speak to Mrs. Stewart alone," he said, in his usual hard manner, and he opened the cabin-door.

This imperative way of his had always repelled me, and now I almost hated him. How could he send me out of my mother's room when she might actually be dying? I tried to say I would not go, but I found no power in me to disobey Captain Brand.

I went to look for Dr. Maxse; he was sitting half asleep, I thought, with our one fellow-passenger, an old clergyman, Mr. Howard.

If I had been differently brought up I might, perhaps, have looked to him for comfort; but, at that time, religion was to me a mere Sunday-business, and Sunday was the dullest day of the week, and clergymen were a part of Sundays. I disliked them, and all that belonged to them; it would be time enough, I considered, to care about such things when I got middle-aged and gray-haired.

Therefore, when I found Mr. Howard's eyes looking at me intently, I felt vexed.

"I am sent to fetch you, Dr. Maxse; are you asleep?" I spoke reprovingly, for he started and gaped as he got up to follow me.

"How unworthy he is to have the charge of my mother! most likely the first real lady he has ever had for a patient."

Does it seem awful that such thoughts should come into my head at such a time? I can only tell my story just as it happened. I am more likely to paint myself better, not worse, than I was.

I led the way to the cabin; but when I tried the door it was locked. I stood waiting patiently, for I could hear my mother's faint, sweet voice. Every now and then Captain Brand answered; but his voice had a muffled sound, and he did not often speak.

I drew away from the door. I was glad to see that Dr. Maxse was awake now, but I thought he also looked inquisitive. I longed to tell him to move farther away.

The cabin-door opened so quietly that we both started.

I saw Captain Brand's face was flushed; he turned his head aside and spoke to the doctor:

"You go in first, Dr. Maxse, and then leave Mrs. Stewart and her daughter alone together."

"Tyrant to the last. Why may I not go in at once?" but I only thought this, I did not speak. I felt in a dull, sullen stupor. It seemed to me that among them they would let my mother die without me, and yet I had no power to struggle or dispute. I knew that the least agitation might end all hope.

Dr. Maxse came out in a minute or so, and held the door for me to go in. I was alone with her at last. She looked better, and my voice came back as I kissed her.

"You are better, darling."

She held up her hand and stopped me, and then she spoke. I cannot tell you exactly what she said; the words so stunned me that I have never been able to recall them, though I gathered in their meaning; but my face must have shown the strong horror I felt, for it seemed to me that her imploring look roused me from a troubled sleep. I was standing close to her; she held my hand clasped in hers.

"You will say, 'Yes,' my darling, my own good, obedient child. I cannot die in peace till you say, 'Yes.' Gertrude, Captain Brand loves you truly, and you will love him in time."

She drew my hand to her lips, but I made no answering caress. I stood like a stone, and then I choked down the words that seemed to come rushing to my lips—words of loathing at what she had said—but this must have been in idea, for I know I stood quiet and stupefied.

It must all be a dream, play-acting, it cannot be reality. My mother, my darling mother, who loves me so dearly, who even now is passing away from me, cannot have asked me to marry Captain Brand, at this time, at once, at her bedside.

I tried to rouse myself. I tried to cry out and protest, but my tongue was dumb. I looked at my mother, and all my faculties were overmastered by the dread of that which I saw so plainly on her face. The momentary glow had faded; to me it seemed that already the Awful Presence was beside us, that the purple shadow of his grasp was already stealing over her.

I do not think I said "Yes," but I must in some way have signified consent.

Presently, the cabin-door opened, and Captain Brand came in, followed by Dr. Maxse, and then Mr. Howard, in his surplice.

To this day I cannot understand my own conduct. I remember watching Mr. Howard quite curiously while he looked out the place

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in a prayer-book, and then I stood listening. Even when I was told to say "I will," and to repeat the other words after the clergyman, I did it mechanically. Not once did my mind connect this ceremony with myself. It was something done for my mother; but there thought remained arrested, it was so impossible to withdraw it from her dearly-loved face to myself.

Only when the words came—solemnly pronouncing us man and wife—I started and tried to pull the ring off. I had seen my mother hold out her hand to Captain Brand, and I had watched him draw a ring from her finger and then place it on mine; but, as I started, Dr. Maxse raised his hand in warning, and then he bent over the bed.

I left the ring on my finger, and clasped my hands in terror.

I hardly waited for Mr. Howard to finish; I ran to the bedside—my mother had fainted.

CHAPTER II.

A CRISIS.

"Go away, every one, except Miss Stewart!" the doctor spoke, decidedly; and I saw in a minute that in a crisis like this he was quite another person from the soft, dawdling man I had thought him. He gave me quick orders in a low voice. I was so fluttered and frightened that it came like comfort to have to obey those short, decided orders.

I needed comfort sorely, for I could scarcely hope. I listened, but I could hear no sound of breathing from the bed. I dared not speak to Dr. Maxse. He never took his eyes for one moment from the face I could no longer see.

It seemed to me that hours went by, and yet he did not move from the bedside; he never even turned his head as he took from my hand all he asked for. At last, he looked round at me.

"Go to my surgery, and bring the small phial I left ready on the table."

I was so blind and sick with fear that my fingers seemed as if they could not find what he had told me to seek—fear that, when I reached the cabin again, I should be too late.

When I came back, there was no longer the same dreadful silence. I could hear her breathing—only too well. Surely, such breathing could not go on. It was not breathing; it was like the gasping, shuddering struggle of some hunted creature. I thought such desperate efforts must surely be the last.

I could not bear it. I sunk into a chair, and covered up my face.

"Don't be frightened, my dear child" (I was quite shocked by the cheeriness in the doctor's voice). "You will be no use, you know, if you get frightened."

What wonderful creatures doctors are! They always know exactly how to give a woman the spur. I was up, almost calm, in an instant, and tried to smile as I handed him the hartshorn-bottle.

I wondered how I could have despised Dr. Maxse. I am sure he never sat down through that night. How long it was, alternating between awful silence, when I believed all hope was ended, and then fierce struggles for breath, which I could not hear without a shudder!

Daylight at last, creeping—creeping in, as if it were ashamed of itself; and then, coming more strongly, it peered into the dark corners of the cabin, and cleared the gloom out of them, and reached the bed.

Then I saw how deadly white was the face lying there with closed eyelids.

I caught Dr. Maxse's arm with both hands.

"Is it over?"

While I waited for his answer, I thought, if he said "Yes," I would jump into the sea.

He turned from the bed, and took my hand.

"Hush!" He drew me to the door, and came out into the gallery. "This is sleep at last, my dear child. I can't feel sure even now, but there is more real hope of life than there has been these two days."

I seemed to hear these words distinctly, and then came a sudden blank, and then I opened my eyes. I was lying in my own berth in the little inner cabin that led out of my mother's.

"I don't remember going to bed," I said, and then I sat up, and pushed the hair out of my eyes. "I only remember Dr. Maxse saying that—" I saw I was not undressed, and that the door which led into my mother's cabin was closed.

What had happened? I did not stay to

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think, but jumped out of bed and opened the door.

Ours was a stern-cabin. My little nook was dark enough, but there was plenty of light when I opened the door.

Some one rose from beside my mother's bed, and I saw that it was Captain Brand, but he did not speak; he just pointed cautiously to the bed, and went away.

Before I even looked at my mother I went to the cabin-door, and drew the bolt across it.

"He shall not come in here ever again, hateful man!"

I went and looked at her; the unnatural paleness had left her face, and her breathing was soft and regular.

I suppose most people would have felt some kind of thankfulness for this unlooked-for change. I did not. I went back to my own little cabin, and burst into a fit of passionate crying. I had been deceived—my mother's life had never been in danger. Dr. Maxse and Captain Brand had planned it all, and my young life had been the sacrifice. I am not sure that I quite acquitted my mother. Oh, what had she done?

"But I don't care" (I drew myself up proudly). "I believe such a marriage is not real or binding. I will make mamma promise to keep me away from Captain Brand till we get to England, and then we can both hide ourselves where he will never find us. How can he, when he is always at sea?"

I did not feel afraid of him. He had done me so great an injury that I threw off at once all the respect which I had till now felt for him. My lips curled contemptuously.

"How silly and childish I am to feel afraid! He is not a gentleman in feeling, or he could not have taken such a base advantage. I believe, if I liked, I could have him tried and transported. A gentleman! the captain of a merchantman!"

I went back to my mother; her sleep lasted so long that I fell into a doze beside her.

I wakened up struggling with some dream-adversary; my mother's eyes were open, and some one was tapping gently at the door.

I kissed her, and, at the sight of her smile, and the fondness in her dear eyes, for the first time I felt grateful. I threw my arms round her and began to cry.

She stroked my hair gently, and then she too heard that odious tapping. I had made up my mind not to answer it—I guessed it was Captain Brand—but my mother pointed to the door.

"Open it, darling," she whispered

I had a hard struggle to obey, but somehow every one always obeyed my mother. She was quiet, but it was impossible to set aside her will; you felt that there was nothing impulsive in it, nothing that had not been well considered and planned beforehand; it seemed to me that the only impulsive action in her life had been that hateful marriage-ceremony.

"Who's there?" I said.

"Open the door," said Dr. Maxse, in a peremptory voice, and I obeyed, for he was a very different person to me to the Dr. Maxse of yesterday.

He went up to my mother, chatted a moment with her, and then told me to come with him to his surgery.

As soon as I was inside the little den he shut the door.

"Now, Miss Stewart, I must give you one caution. Your mother is better, much better than I could have hoped for; but her entire recovery depends more on you than on me."

"On me?" I stared at him.

"Yes; any excitement will be fatal, and she will talk to you, of course, about—" he hesitated and looked in my face; he saw something there which made him stammer, "I—I—I know you will be careful, but, whatever" (such a stress on the ever) "Mrs. Stewart may say, you must not contradict her, you must not answer so as to agitate her—her life is at stake."

I felt my face flush violently.

How insolent doctors are! I suppose he saw my horror last night, and he thinks I shall protest against what happened, just as if I should be likely to contradict her at such a time!

"Is that all you have to say?"

Dr. Maxse looked so sheepish, so pained by my haughty manner, that I held out my hand. I believe I thought myself a young queen on board the Adelaide.

"I have not thanked you for your kindness and devotion, Dr. Maxse, but I shall never forget it."

The doctor smiled, and held the door open for me to pass out.

The smile disconcerted me.

"What does he mean? I said nothing

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absurd;" and then it glimmered across my thoughts that perhaps, after all, the doctor did not care whether I forgot or remembered my gratitude.

"He must care about mamma's gratitude, if he cares nothing for mine."

I went back to her.

To my surprise, she did not speak of what had happened. She seemed unwilling to speak at all; only anxious that I should lie down and rest.

CHAPTER III.

AN EXPLANATION.

My mother's strength came back more rapidly than the doctor expected. Just a week after the night that he had despaired of her recovery, he said she had better go up on deck and sit there for a little.

I was very unwilling. I had not seen Captain Brand since that dreadful night, and I shrank from him. He had not come to the cabin even to ask how my mother was. There was a poor girl on board, a *protégée* of the old clergyman, and she waited on us and got all we wanted.

My mother had not once spoken to me of the marriage, or of Captain Brand, and the doctor's warning kept me silent. I was too much afraid of agitating her to begin on the subject; besides, I did not wish to discuss it on board the Adelaide. I was helpless at present. When I had got my mother safe away all by myself in England, I could persuade her to do as I wished.

I looked at her wistfully when Dr. Maxse went away, but I saw she was preparing to obey, so I kept silent.

"We shall not stay long," I thought.

We found a most comfortable resting-place. A sofa had been brought up, and an awning stretched over it, and cushions and wraps enough for half a dozen invalids lay scattered about.

But I would not praise any thing, I felt that all this care was due to Captain Brand. I settled my mother comfortably among her cushions, and opened my book to go on with our reading, for I had read to her constantly during this week of recovery. Just as I began, I heard some one coming along the deck. I knew the firm tread at once—my hands got cold and my face hot, but I tried to look determined. I fixed my eyes on the sea, shimmering and glittering in the sunshine. I did not even turn my head while Captain Brand was speaking to my mother — speaking in such a low, gentle voice, full of tender deference.

"Yes, he can be gentle now he has got all he wants, the hypocrite; I hate him."

I said this to the sea.

"Gertrude, my dear, here is Captain Brand."

For an instant I thought I would not shake hands with him; but I changed my mind. It would be well not to acknowledge any change in our relations to one another.

"I will be exactly the same as if nothing had happened, and then he cannot presume to be different."

For, although I was only sixteen years old, I was a lady, and, as it seemed to me, made of quite different clay to this big, awkward-looking captain of a merchant-ship.

I gave him a lifeless hand; but, when I felt the firm clasp in which he held it, I could not act out my resolution. I had meant to look fully at him, and, instead, I hung down my head for very shame of the burning blushes that seemed to scorch my eyelashes. I pulled my hand angrily away, and jumped up. I could hardly keep from crying with anger at myself. I, a lady—why, I was behaving like a little foolish school-girl, "a sort of creature like Dora in 'David Copperfield.'" I thought I had always felt an intense dislike to that very uncomfortable and impulsive young person.

Neither my mother nor Captain Brand took any notice. I had rarely joined in their talks; why should I join now? I walked up and down as far from them as I could.

"It must come now. As soon as that hateful man goes away, mamma will call me to account, and I can't be a hypocrite. I suppose"—here I could hardly keep from crying again—"I must not show her all my disgust, for fear of agitating her. I hope Dr. Maxse is right about this; but he has not always been right. When I think what that first mistake of his caused, it seems to shake all belief in him out of me."

"Gertrude!"

I looked back at the sound of my mother's voice. Captain Brand was sitting beside her. As I drew near he got up, but I did not look at him.

"I am going below with the captain. He

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will come up and tell you when we have finished our chat."

He gave her his arm as tenderly as if she had been his mother. I watched them out of sight, and then a great bitterness came to me.

"My mother actually likes this man. She places confidence in him. Can she really mean him to be my husband?"

I was left alone with my thoughts, more alone than I had been for some days. My mother had required constant care during this week of recovery.

I began to try and realize this marriage.

Had my mother repented her haste, and was she now willfully deceiving Captain Brand, and trying to keep friends with him till we landed? or could it be possible that she thought I should consent to become his wife?

There was not peace or rest in either thought. I walked faster and faster up and down the deck. At one of my rapid turns I met the captain face to face.

"Will you go to Mrs. Stewart now?" He spoke gently, but he did not look at me—he was plainly as indifferent as I was myself. When I got to the ladder, he did not even offer me his hand.

So much the better; I should only have refused it. My cheeks grew hot again.

"Perhaps Captain Brand only consented to the marriage from compassion, to please my mother. It is scarcely likely a grave, quiet man of thirty—I am sure he is as old as that, and thirty is an immense age—it is not likely he can wish to be burdened with a useless, wild young creature of sixteen. But I am not going to be his wife, even if he does wish it. Still, it is dreadful to think he only offered to marry me out of compassion."

I felt vexed with myself and every one else by the time I reached the cabin.

My mother looked eagerly at me as I came into the cabin. She seemed very tired; she was sitting in her easy-chair, propped up by some of the cushions Captain Brand had carried down.

By a contradiction I had no power to struggle against, my tongue broke loose:

"How badly that man has placed the pillows—how awkward he is!"

This was not true. I had not then learned how skillful the tenderness of a man's nursing can be.

"Hush!" My mother took fast hold of one of my hands, and put an end to my fidgeting among the cushions. "Sit down here, my darling. I have very much to say, and I may not be long with you, Gertrude."

"Mother"—I hid my eyes on her knees—"you get stronger and better every day. You never have been so ill as Doctor Maxse made you think you were." I looked up at her as I ended. Such a sad, sweet smile came over her face.

"You must not be deceived, Gertrude. There is so little life left in me that any shock would destroy it. I believe that only Captain Brand's proposal and the revulsion it caused saved me then."

I raised my head. "I can't understand it," I said, indignantly; "I should have thought it would have made you miserable." And then I was so frightened at my own words that I threw my arms round her and kissed her.

But my mother was very patient.

"Listen, my dear child; you had better know all at once. I was taking you to England—a ruinous expense, Gertrude, in your father's present circumstances—in the hope of finding you a home there. I think you know that your father and I offended all our relations by our marriage. Lady Chilham was the only person who has ever shown an interest in us, and through her I hoped to have effected a reconciliation; but the evening before we sailed came the news of her death; it seemed too late then to retract. I hoped that some unlooked-for chance might smooth my way; I feel now that I shall not reach England, and you cannot go among your relations alone and unprotected, as this would offend them."

I did not believe her fears. I thought she was only trying to reconcile me to the marriage.

"Mother, any thing would be better than Captain Brand."

She grew so white at my vehemence that I was frightened into silence. She pointed to the medicine, which always revived her, and I gave it. My fingers shook so, that I could hardly measure it into a wine-glass.

"If there had been time, Gertrude, you should not have been hurried; but, indeed, my darling, I am happy about you; you are too young to think of love or marriage either. Captain Brand is a considerate, noble-minded man; he says he feels you are too young, and he does not wish to claim you as his wife for

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two years at least. In that time, my darling, you will learn to love this good man; you are a dear child, but you are scarcely worthy of him, or able to appreciate him yet. I cannot tell you how highly I think of him."

I started up, I actually writhed; surely my mother was infatuated. Worthy! I, the daughter of Algernon Stewart, the granddaughter of the Honorable Duncan Stewart, not worthy of Captain Brand! but I kept silence.

"You are angry, dearest; it is only natural; you have been robbed of the right which a girl considers she has, to choose her own husband, but I am not sure that this is a real idea; if we had gone on living in Tasmania, very likely your husband would have been chosen for you. In our class of life, Gertrude, a girl can so seldom consult inclination in marrying—"

"You did, mother."

I could not see my mother's face, but her voice sounded very feeble and broken.

"Yes, we did; but our children have paid the penalty of our obstinacy."

She closed her eyes, as if she were weary; but I could not have gone on talking. I was so young that, when a new thought came to me, I fastened on it at once, till I had made out what irritated my curiosity.

"Oh," I said, to myself, "I begin to understand; papa and mamma found out that marrying for love was a mistake; they never seemed quite as much lovers as I should like;" here I shivered at the thought of Captain Brand. "I suppose trials and worry do weaken love, and yet it seems to me a poor kind of love that is weakened by them, and I am sure mamma must love in the best possible way."

This was a puzzle; and, as I never was clever, I left off thinking about my parents, and came back to myself. It is not half so dull to think about one's self as about others: one can imagine and picture for one's self; with others one can only puzzle and wonder, unless, indeed, one is like old Miss Macnee, who is always settling the thread of other people's lines after her own pattern.

My thoughts went off in another direction; this was better than I had expected; he would not claim me for two years, my mother said. "Of course, I am not really married; and, if I get away so that Captain Brand can never find me, I can marry somebody I *do* love, and be ever so happy—some one young and bright, who has beautiful eyes, and who is a hero and a thorough gentleman. I am sure every one may be perfectly happy if careful just to marry the right person."

And then came back my mother's sad look as she had spoken of her own marriage.

"Dear me," my head began to ache with all this unwonted thought. "I wonder which I mean—the right person, or the person one loves; why can't they always be the same?"

Meanwhile my mother sank into a doze which lasted till evening; and these ideas about marriage had so disturbed me, that I got a book, so as to shake off the memory.

I had been reading "I promessi Sposi" with my mother, and I went on with it to myself.

It seemed to carry on my puzzle. Lucia's love must have given her some sure intuition that Renzo was the right man, or she would not have gone through so much for his sake; and then, again, Desdemona—Othello was not the right husband for her, of course, or he would not have murdered her, and yet she married for love—ah, but then I never could like Desdemona; she is deceitful; and, besides, she marries without her father's consent.

Here my cheeks grew hot.

"If I cared very much for any one, I should marry and please myself, never mind what my father said."

Then came a sudden knock at our cabin-door.

CHAPTER IV.

LEFT ALONE.

The mate, Mr. Stacey, opened it before I said, "Come in."

"By your leave, ladies, I must put you in the dark."

He went to our little window, and in a few minutes we were in total darkness.

"What are you doing, Mr. Stacey?" I said.

"There is a gale, I suppose," my mother said, gently.

I thought she was asleep, she had been lying some time with her eyes closed.

"Not much, but our captain always likes to be on the safe side," and I heard the cabin-door closed.

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I groped about for a match to light the lamp. I had been sitting half asleep before Mr. Stacey came, and now, as I moved, I found that it was difficult to keep steady, the ship was rolling so. At last I managed to light the lamp, and then, in an instant, the cabin seemed to go upside-down, and every loose article in it flew into a heap in the middle. My mother was flung off her bed, and I found myself close beside her.

I was too much bewildered to feel actual fear. We both lay still; there was a fearful cracking overhead; then dashing, furious sounds, as if the sea itself were over us, and then a roar like thunder shook the ship.

I was terribly frightened now. If I had not had my mother to take care of, I believe I should have fainted with terror.

I tried to help her up, but she resisted.

"We had best keep still for a little, Gertrude," she said. "We are safe lying down; I have been in a gale before; it may go off as suddenly as it began, or it may last some time."

I wondered that she could speak so calmly.

"Is there—do you think there is danger?"

I asked this in an agony of fear. All my new-born hatred of life had fled. I could not be drowned in this dreadful, raging sea. I would not.

"I shall go and ask Captain Brand if there is danger; if he is worth any thing, he must save the ship."

I scrambled up on my feet, but, before I could cling to any support, I was thrown down again.

My mother stretched out her hand, and held my arm fast.

"It is useless," she said, "you cannot reach the deck, my darling; and, if you could, you would be washed overboard. We cannot help; we can only be patient, and we can pray, Gertrude."

I had not thought of this, and it was a relief to be able to do any thing, though in those days prayer was a mere stated formality said out of a book. My mother prayed aloud, earnestly, that we might be delivered from the fury of the storm. I tried to follow her words, but I could not. My throat was choked. Still, it was comforting to listen to her.

The lamp went out while she was still praying; but we were afraid to relight it.

Oh, how awful the darkness was, and how it doubled the horror of the furious, roaring sea!—for it was not the empty, silent atmosphere the word darkness creates; it was a blackness filled with roaring of wind and water, with the groans of the unhappy, tormented ship as she strained and heaved under the mighty buffets that struck her, now on this side, now on the other, till I wondered she was not pitched reeling to the bottom.

I clinched my hands in agony; I felt so strong just then, it was maddening to be there helpless on the cabin-floor. Why, we might be drowned, cooped up there before any one could help us. Just as this thought came, my mother slipped her soft hand into mine. How cold it was!

I felt her face, and that, too, was cold. Here was something I could do. I folded my arms round her, and tried to keep her warm.

Hours went on in the dark silence, broken with us only now and then by my mother's faintly-uttered prayers; while overhead and all around the incessant tumult went on raging. It seemed to me impossible that any ship could endure much longer the violent blows which struck her. When I look back to those long, awful hours, I feel quite sure that I never did any thing so difficult in my life as that lying still and passive, with my mother clasped in my arms. Courage and daring would have been so much easier than that long spell of patience.

I must have fallen sound asleep. I waked suddenly and heard voices in the cabin.

"Then it is uncertain how far we are from land"—my mother was speaking.

"Quite."

I had so expected to hear Captain Brand's voice that I started when Dr. Maxse's came instead.

"The ship has been driven out of her course in this gale; it was the only chance of safety to let her drive. Captain Brand has saved the ship, but he could not save her from serious damage; but, please God, the worst is over. You see the men have such confidence in the captain that they work with a will."

By this time I had fully wakened; the din overhead had ceased, and I began to feel that the floor was wet, and that I too was wet and shivering.

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Dr. Maxse stood close by me, lighting the lamp.

He turned round and looked at me.

"Ah, you are wet, Miss Gertrude. In half an hour or so you shall come on deck and breathe fresh air again."

I looked at my mother; she was deadly white.

"How long have we been shut up here?" I said.

"About eight hours or so."

He spoke quickly, and then he stooped down over my mother, and held a case-bottle to her lips.

"Have you got a biscuit anywhere, Miss Gertrude? your mamma wants her breakfast, and there's no knowing when the kitchen will be fit for use again."

I found it was easier to move, though I was stiff with lying on the floor, but the ship still throbbed and quivered as if each movement gave her pain.

Doctor Maxse followed me, and, as I opened the biscuit-tin, he put his mouth to my ear and whispered:

"The storm is over, but it has done terrible damage. Do not make a fuss about changing your wet clothes; if you have money or valuables, fasten them inside your gown."

I stood puzzled to try and make out his meaning, but he went back to my mother and helped her on to the sofa, and fed her with biscuit. Did he mean we were in danger, or had I fancied these words. I dared not question him; he was smiling cheerfully at my mother; evidently he wished her not to know. I looked at her, and her face was ghastly in its whiteness.

"Thank you, doctor." I trembled at the weak, quavering voice; "it is very good of you to come to us, but we must not detain you. I am sure you have patients who need you among those poor sailors." She looked at him anxiously, and I saw his face grow graver.

"There are just a few casualties," he said. —"Well, Miss Gertrude, I will look in presently, and take you both upon deck, if your mamma feels better."

He went away, and my mother kept on eating biscuit. It seemed to me she was forcing herself to eat, for she asked for more after I had left off giving it. I stood trembling. I wondered whether she had heard the doctor's whisper.

"The doctor is right, Gerty," she said, presently; "we may still be in danger, though the storm is over."

She saw the terror in my face, and she smiled.

"We are in God's hands, dearest. He is with us quite as much in danger as He is in times of safety; you and I can do nothing to help."

"Oh—I can—I can!" I could not keep back a sob of agony; "I can go up on deck and see with my own eyes what has really happened; there is no use in being cooped up here in ignorance."

"Gerty—I—I do not want to be left." I knew she said this to keep me below; it was so unlike my mother to think of herself. "Will you find me my little writing-case, darling, and will you put your watch, and your rings, and any thing you want, and take care of it inside the body of your gown?"

It was very awful to hear her speak in this calm way; but the awe itself quieted me, and checked the wild terror Doctor Maxse's warning had roused. I felt suddenly that she had only me to take care of her, and that I must be strong and brave.

"I have only my watch," I said, "and my rings. I put all my other ornaments in my large writing-desk, and that is in one of the tin cases in the hold."

My mother did not speak again, and I tried to occupy myself with the lamp, it burned so very dimly. I longed intensely to see daylight again; the confined atmosphere must surely suffocate my mother, I thought—the cabin felt like a prison in the semi-darkness.

"Mamma"—I tried to speak very resolutely—"it must be more than half an hour since Doctor Maxse was here. Now that the wind has lulled, the sailors cannot be busy. I shall go on deck, and get some one to unfasten the window. As we are the only passengers, I really think Captain Brand is very neglectful. I must get this shutter opened."

I moved to the cabin-door, and stood there a moment looking at her—her face was whiter still.

In that instant while I looked, we were flung up in the air, and then we fell, with every thing else, on the floor, while the ship crashed and grated horribly, and then reeled over as if she were going to the bottom of the sea.

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In that awful darkness, I thought, "Is this death?" and then, I do not know how long after, a strong arm lifted me up, and I was carried into daylight.

The sudden light made me close my eyes.

"All right, my men," said Captain Brand's voice, and I saw he held me.

"Save my mother!" I shrieked.

"All right, your mother is safe;" and he fastened me quickly to some rigging, and then I saw Mr. Stacey and one of the sailors placing my mother close beside me.

"Keep up a good heart—we shall be all right by-and-by," the captain said; and he went away.

I looked round—that awful crash was still quivering through my body, but my courage had not gone again. My mother looked less ghastly than she had looked in the cabin, and this cheered me. The ship looked terrible; one of the masts was gone; the starboard bulwark had been entirely carried away, and all the fittings of the deck had disappeared. I saw, too, that it was stove in in several places. We could see the fore-hatchway from where we were fastened, and, as I looked, my heart seemed to stand still. There was a knot of sailors there, baling water in buckets out of the ship.

I looked quickly at my mother, and I saw that her eyes were also fixed on the group.

"But, mother"—my own voice startled me, it was so hoarse—"I thought there were pumps to get rid of the water?"

She looked very grave.

"You may be sure that if the pumps were of any use they would be working; probably they are choked. I believe the ship will not hold together long."

As she spoke, I saw, on the farther side of the deck, three sailors lying motionless.

I guessed that they were dead, and I looked away, in the hope that my mother would not see them.

It is very strange to look back on those minutes. I do not think I had the least hope of escape; but I had no fear. Either the awe of the whole scene had blunted my senses, or, as every one else was calm and humbled, I was controlled into the same state, I cannot tell. I lay watching the glimpses I got of the sea, for I could not see much, I was so low on the deck; the sailors baling with rapid energy of movement, and other sailors, near where we lay, busy at something else. Once I saw Captain Brand, but he passed out of sight again.

Suddenly a foaming wave came roaring over us; the ship reared up on one end like a frightened horse; if we had not been securely fastened we must have been washed overboard, and we felt the ship crunched down violently.

"God have mercy on us!" my mother's faint voice said; and there was a loud, sudden outcry from the men at the fore-hatchway; they ran up toward us, and began to unfasten the long boat. I looked for Captain Brand; I felt as if the men would desert us, and leave us alone to perish in the sinking ship.

In an instant—so sudden that he must have been quite near us—Captain Brand was among the sailors; he was so much taller than any of them that he seemed to tower above them all.

"Stop there!" The men stood still at once. I could not make out his next words, but he spoke as calmly as if there were no danger; and yet I felt sure the ship was sinking.

My mother closed her eyes; I tried to understand all that was happening.

I could not see over the ship's side now, but there was plainly some difficulty and delay in casting off the boat; I lost all my fear as I watched Captain Brand; I was fascinated by his firm energy, and by the implicit way in which the men obeyed his rapid, decided orders. It seemed as if he did not need a moment to plan or reflect; as if he had foreseen all this, and knew every detail of our situation, and what was needful. At last the boat was lowered, and he came up to us.

"Now, Mrs. Stewart"—he spoke quite calmly—"we must see about you; do not be afraid, every thing is going well; we have only one boat to trust to now, but it is the safest."

He unfastened my mother, raised her very tenderly, and carried her away in his arms.

He stopped and looked back at me over his shoulder.

"I will come for you when your mother is safe."

"No, no; send any one for me! Oh, don't leave my mother!"

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I clasped my hands; even then he could smile cheerfully.

"I will save you both, please God; but your mother shall take no harm."

As soon as he was out of sight an icy coldness crept round my heart; I tried to see Dr. Maxse, but I could not; I caught a glimpse of Mr. Howard near where the boat had been launched, but there seemed only a few sailors left on board.

Then I remembered that a captain is always the last to leave a ship. Suppose Captain Brand came back too late to save me, and I was left alone with him on this doomed ship. I looked again; I could not see our sailor, and I felt sure the ship was lower in the water than when Captain Brand dragged me upon deck. Time seemed to go so slowly, and it was deadly cold.

I wonder which is best, to go down alone in the ship, or to perish with all the others in that boat? We may be hundreds of miles from land, after what Dr. Maxse said. I have read ghastly stories of shipwrecked people starving and dying, one by one, in the midst of the wide sea; I am growing dull and stupefied with the cold; it begins to be like a dream, not a real misery happening to myself; I forget even to think about my mother.

Here is Captain Brand, at last. In an instant he has lifted me up, and is carrying me like a baby in his strong arms. Oh, what a shelter they feel to me!

He says, "Don't cling to me." I cannot see any thing, and I feel him loose his hold, and I fall, but I am not hurt. I am safe in the boat, and Mr. Stacey is holding me.

"Where is he?" I say. I cannot see Captain Brand; and then he leaps down into the boat, and in an instant we have got away from the side of the ship, for the men are rowing desperately; some of them are lying in the bottom of the boat; my mother is between me and Mr. Howard, and I see all this in a strange, unrealizing way, and then I speak to my mother.

I am close beside her, but Captain Brand has wrapped a cloak round her, which hides her face.

"Mother!" She does not answer, and I feel for her hand. I want her to know that we are close together, though we are cast adrift on that vast, cruel-looking sea.

Her hand feels icy cold.

"Mother, mother, speak to me!" My own voice startled me, there is so sharp a ring of anguish in it. I tear away the cloak from her face. Ah, there is no mistaking the pinched outline, the awful grayness, stamped there. But I must master Death myself; she shall not leave me!

"Doctor! Dr. Maxse!"

I looked round wildly. No one answers; and then I see that Dr. Maxse is not among us.

Captain Brand has gone to the helm. Mr. Howard and Mr. Stacey came at my cry, and tried their utmost to revive my mother; but very soon Mr. Stacey gives up his efforts, and goes to Captain Brand, and takes his place at the helm. I seem to feel that Captain Brand will revive her. He bends over her, and then he lays his hand on her heart.

Oh, the anguish I learn from his face! He draws the cloak quickly round her, and lays her gently down in the boat. I clasp his hand in both mine, and try to speak, but I cannot—I read the truth in his face.

Never till I die will this awful picture leave my memory; even now I can hardly write about it; but storm-clouds, still heavy, hung on the horizon, and a broad glare of sunlight glittering over the measureless space of heaving sea, glittering on the sinking ship now far away, and on ourselves, Mr. Howard and the girl I have spoken of crouching in utter misery; the sailors, with their brown, sad, downcast faces, rowing with all their might, some few lying exhausted at the bottom of the great boat; and Captain Brand looking at me with a great sorrow on his face. This is all I can remember distinctly. Every thing grows confused, and I lose consciousness.

I seemed to rouse from sleep; I opened my eyes, to find that I was being lifted up, and carried, it seemed to me, a long way upstairs, and then I was laid down gently on a bed, and I fell asleep again.

CHAPTER V.

AN AWAKENING.

I LEARNED afterward that, after being out at sea in the boat all day, toward evening we were picked up by the Eclair, a small French vessel bound for Havre, but when I first

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roused from my long unconsciousness I fancied I was safe on board the Adelaide.

But as I looked up I saw, just above the sofa on which I lay, a mirror with a silver sconce on each side of it; there had been nothing of this kind in our cabin on board the Adelaide.

I rose up on my elbow and caught a glimpse of my face—only a glimpse. I was so weak and giddy that I fell back on the pillow. I began to doubt my own identity as much as that of the cabin—the face I had seen in the glass was too pale and thin to be mine.

"This is a dream," I thought, and I lay still with closed eyelids, but thought had wakened up fully, and the fact came back vividly, and with such a sharp sting of agony that I longed to escape its bitterness; I could not lie there bearing it. I sat up, and then I saw that I had been undressed, and that my clothes lay neatly folded beside me. A dim memory began to stir that, in my sleep, I had felt some one bending over me giving me drink.

I dressed myself, but I felt very weak, and as I walked across to the cabin-door my head seemed to reel.

I opened the door, and I saw some one just outside it—it was the girl who had waited on us on board the Adelaide.

"Oh, thank goodness, miss, you've waked up; the captain will be terrible pleased, that he will; you've been lying there, miss, for days and days, and we've just fed you, miss, as if you was a infant."

"Who do you mean by we, and what ship is this?" I spoke very harshly.

"Please, miss, may I come in?"—she made a deep courtesy, and looked frightened—"your bed, miss, do want making, that it do." She went up to the sofa and began to pull off the bedclothes. "It's a French ship, miss, as picked us up, and it was only me and the captain as have waited on you—the captain wouldn't let a soul else in."

The color spread over my face. I felt desperately proud and angry all in a moment.

"Where's Dr. Maxse?" It seemed to me that the doctor would have been a much fitter nurse than Captain Brand.

"Lor! miss!"—the girl's eyes opened widely—"I forgot you didn't know, how should you, poor dear? The poor doctor he fell overboard and was drowned just before we was all going away in the boat. Ah, miss, we was out in that boat all day, till this ship picked us up. Yes, miss, the prayers was read for the poor doctor at the same time as they was read for your poor mamma."

She stopped abruptly, and looked frightened. I guessed that she had been cautioned not to tell me.

"Do you mean"—I could hardly speak—"that Mrs. Stewart has been buried in the sea?"

"Well, miss," she spoke soothingly, "you see they couldn't help it; they waited, but you never roused to be sensible, and the French captain was positive against keeping a dead body on board, so our captain had to give in, but he was mortal vexed."

"Do you say this is a French ship?"

"Yes, miss; it's the Eclair, and you and me, miss, is the only females on board."

"You can go now, Harriet."

She went, and I stood thinking.

I had pitied myself on board the Adelaide with my mother beside me, and with two years of escape between myself and Captain Brand. I thought now that such a state had been comparatively a happy one. How could I escape from Captain Brand now? What refuge had I against him? He was my only protector on board this strange ship.

"I would rather be without one," and then I went to the door and fastened it, and then I broke down completely. All this hard despair—all thought of myself or of Captain Brand—yielded to unutterable sorrow.

Yes, I was indeed left alone.

My mother was gone—taken away so suddenly, and just as I had learned to love her truly. How little store we had all set by her at home! We had all loved her, I suppose, as girls think they love their mothers; we had taken her watchful tender care over us as a matter of course—she was our mother. I had seen very little of her in our home; but now, thinking over the life there, I knew how much she must have cared for us.

"Ah, but we had never thought of her and of her feelings; we had never tried"—I sobbed to myself in my lonely misery—"to pour back into her heart some of the tenderness she had so fondly, so gently shown. We had, perhaps, tried to be good children, but sometimes there had been no loving anxiety in our hearts, lest we might fail in daughterly tenderness." Just then I felt that I would give up all prospect of happiness if I

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could only have my darling mother back to love once more.

Thinking so of her, I softened toward Captain Brand.

"She liked him so much, I think she even loved him; and how noble he was in the wreck!"

I began to wish to see him; he could tell me all this last history, and he loved her, too, and I longed to be with some one who had known and loved her.

CHAPTER VI.

IN THE CABIN OF THE ECLAIR.

The sun shines so brightly that the sea is like a huge shield of ribbed gold; birds come fluttering on to the masts. Strange-looking fish leap up high in the air, and through all this mirth of Nature the little Eclair bounds forward as if she rejoiced in these tokens of near harborage.

The French sailors are dancing and singing, every one on deck looks bright and happy.

I cannot bear it, and I get up and go away.

I will go below and shut out the sunshine, my heart aches sorely. "Sunshine" was one of my pet names at home, because I was always ready for fun and frolic, and now I feel so out of harmony with the universal brightness that it seems as if even Nature is conspiring to injure me.

I said that I looked forward to seeing Captain Brand, and I have seen him. It is now a week since my recovery, but I miscalculated my feelings, and, just as shy, sensitive natures can be frank and charming in letters, and stiff and awkward face to face, even with those they love dearly, so in presence of this big, grave-faced man, I felt strange and timid; all the sympathy I was longing to exchange with him froze, and I actually drew my hand out of his because he held it a moment longer than I thought necessary. So that, instead of the soothing comfort I expected, I just got a dry matter-of-fact narrative of the shipwreck, and all that had since happened.

"How could my darling mother like him? What could she find in such a wooden, commonplace creature?"

Besides my dislike, I had had a special quarrel against Captain Brand from the time we set sail in the Adelaide; I had felt afraid of him—actually shy, and I am never shy; I thought shyness low-bred in those days.

Since this first talk about the shipwreck, Captain Brand seems to trouble himself little about me. I always find a comfortable seat ready for me on deck, and there are many little attentions in my cabin which I feel must be contrived by him, but somehow all this makes me contradictory.

"It would be kinder in every way if he would let me forget him as much as possible."

The Eclair is a small merchant-ship, and there is little accommodation for passengers on board, so I take my meals in my cabin. I come on deck once a day. I am not often likely to see Captain Brand, and till now I had only spoken to him and the French captain. Mr. Howard is ill, and stays below.

On this sunny morning I get up impetuously from my comfortable resting-place. I stoop to pick up a book I had let fall, and a hand reaches it and gives it to me.

"Voilà! mademoiselle."

The French mate is close beside me, he looks at me attentively, so attentively that I blush in thanking him, and then I try to pass on.

"Pardon, but mademoiselle is not, I hope, going below in such beautiful weather; it is so dull below. Ah!"

Here he shrugs his shoulders with a look of disgust.

For a moment I feel indignant.

"If my mother were here, a man of this class would not dare even to look at me," and then I smiled bitterly at myself.

What am I now? it cannot matter about being well born when I am actually married to the captain of a merchantman. I look at the Frenchman, and I wish that Captain Brand was at least as young and as attractive.

This mate has such a bright face, it looks full of sunshine, as if it had only known summer; there is no touch of winter there. A warm glow comes through his dark skin and into his dark, lustrous eyes. His hair and beard even are more crisp in their waves than those of a northern man.

But these dark eyes scan my face so freely that I throw back my head in a way I have

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when I am vexed. Just then I hear Captain Brand's step.

By some strange perversity I turn to look up in his face.

He is not looking at me. His eyes are fixed on the Frenchman, and I see how angry he is.

"If mademoiselle is in want of any thing," he says to the mate, in execrable French, "you should communicate with her through me."

But the mate seems not to understand English - French. He shakes his head and smiles, and then he turns away from Captain Brand, and points out to me a curious bird that had settled on the rigging.

How dare he interfere!

I resolved to give Captain Brand a lesson he must learn, that I am my own mistress, and that I shall talk to every one I choose. I am not under his control.

At last I have found a way of punishing him for the great, cruel wrong he has done me. The anger in his face teaches me how I can wound him.

I smile as sweetly as I can up into those bold, dark eyes which affronted me so just now.

"It is very beautiful and curious, too," I say, in French. I can speak French easily. "Do you know its name?"

I just glance up. Captain Brand is frowning at me.

"He thinks I am his wife, does he?" I smile again at the French mate as he answers me. "He had better learn at once that I don't like him, and that I would rather talk to any man than him."

I have seen very few men. My two sisters are much older than I am, and I have always lived in the school-room with my governess. My mother said I must not appear in society till my sisters married. My governess was more like a man than a woman, so I never talked nonsense with her. I have had no practice, but flirting is inborn in some girls, I believe.

My sadness suddenly lifts. I am able to laugh and talk quite gayly with Monsieur Rendu.

I feel happier than I have been for weeks; the Frenchman's light, laughing spirits cheer me, and, besides, I enjoy showing Captain Brand that I can talk when I please, though I am so dull and silent toward him.

After a bit, Monsieur Rendu returns to his duty, and I move to go to my cabin.

I pass close by Captain Brand, but I do not choose to look up at him.

"Frowning still, I hope; he will not interfere with me again, I suspect."

Before I have passed him, I feel his hand on my arm. I draw myself away, but I cannot get free from his heavy, firm grasp. Oh, how I hate him!

"Gertrude, listen to me"—in such a stiff, solemn voice that I start and look up; "you have only me to take care of you now; don't talk to that Frenchman."

A kind of wild pride flashes through my veins like an electric shock, but I do not show it. I try hard to keep up the cold manner I always had toward him.

"You have nothing to do with me; I can do as I like."

I look at him, and all my fear leaves me. He is not quiet and self-restrained now; his face works uneasily, and he has grown quite red. I smile at the anger in his eyes; it is delightful to feel that I can torment him as much as I please, and that he has no power over me.

"Will you let me pass, please?" I say, politely; "I am tired of staying here."

"Then come below with me"—he speaks roughly and hurries me along, and then down the steps till we stand at my cabin-door.

"You can't come in here!"—my voice shakes, for I am trying not to cry, his manner so frightens me. I begin to wish I had not teased him. No one has ever spoken roughly to me except Captain Brand, and for the first time I shudder that I am alone among all these rude sailors.

He bends down over me; I dare not look up, his face is too near mine; but I know by his voice that he is not angry now.

"May I not come in?"—so gently that I start. "I will go away directly, if you still wish it; I only want to say a few words that I cannot say before others; let me come in. All on board think I am your brother, and they were used to see me in and out of your cabin at first." He mutters the last words as if he is ashamed of them.

The blood rushes over my face. He has nursed and cared for me, then, during my illness. I dreaded this, and I am bitterly angry that he has had the chance of serving me, but it seems to give him a kind of power I am

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forced to obey. I stand sullenly while he opens the cabin-door, and then I go in, and he follows me.

I stand, because I do not choose to ask him to sit down. I am glad to see him go and lean against the door, as far off from me as he can get.

"First"—he speaks very gently still—"I must ask you to hear me out, even if what I say vexes you. I have been so long at sea that I am little used to the ways of society; it is franker to say at once that I am a rougher, plainer kind of man than those you have lived among; but I want you to understand that I don't mean to be unkind, even when I seem roughest. I have been wishing to tell you this all along, my—" Here he stops; there is a tone in his voice that controls me; it seems as if he were keeping down strong feeling. I do not know what to say, so I wait for him to go on.

"Just now you said I had nothing to do with you, Gertrude"—I frown, he has no right to call me by my name—"but I must make this clear to you. I promised to leave you wholly in your dear mother's care, but she was then likely to live; you are left alone, and you must have a protector, or you will appear as friendless as she dreaded to leave you when she gave me a right to take care of you."

I hear the strong, helpful tone in his voice which made me cling to him on the night of the shipwreck, but I will not listen to it; it is only my foolish fear of him coming back, and I strive against it, and tell myself I have a right to be very angry; it is mean and cowardly of Captain Brand to turn my mother's fears against me.

"You have no right in me till I am eighteen." I do not want to make him suspect my resolve to escape, but, still, if I can make him dislike me, he will be glad to break through our marriage. Surely, no man wants to keep to a disagreeable wife. His next words surprised me. He does not look angry; he seems shocked by my behavior, and speaks sternly:

"Once for all, Gertrude, you had better learn as soon as possible that I am an honorable man; if you had shown me this want of confidence before the night you married me, it would have been better for your future to have taken its chance."

"I wish it had," I said, impetuously; "oh, how I wish it had!"

I feel my eyes flash, and then I am sorry for my imprudence. I look up hurriedly. No; Captain Brand is not angry; instead, I fancy, his deep-set blue eyes have a pitiful tenderness in them. This frightens me into shyness again.

"Oh, I like him angry best; if he makes love to me I shall hate him."

He comes close up to where I stand, trembling with agitation, but he does not even touch my hand.

"My dear child"—his voice is wonderfully sweet for such a big, rough-looking man—"I suppose I ought to say I am of the same opinion, but I can't say it truly as my wish. I ought long ago to have told you how repugnant it was to me to take you, as I did, without asking you for your consent, but circumstances made this impossible; we could only consider your mother. I feel—" He draws a deep breath, and looks so earnest that my eyes fix on his. "Try not to be angry with me, Gertrude, for saying this, but I do feel so sure of winning your love one day that I cannot give you up now." My eyes droop, and I shrink away. He must have seen that I am shrinking; his voice goes into a question. "How can I give you up, child? Is the holy ceremony that has joined us together nothing—to be set aside by our mere will? You have been too well taught to think so; we are one, Gertrude, till death divides us; but we will never argue about this. Now, sit down quietly, I want to talk to you about yourself."

I try to speak out frankly, and tell him that I have never really consented, that I acted solely from fear of shortening my mother's life; if I could then have made myself trust him, perhaps all might have been ended between us, but my words seemed choked. I am too much afraid of Captain Brand to speak out—too strange to his character to understand him. To me he is only a rough, rude man, and his sudden change of manner makes me fear a violent outburst of passion if I were to tell him that nothing can ever change my feelings toward him. If he is so determined to make me his wife, he can keep me prisoner for these two years; then what shall I do?

No, I hated deceit, but frankness with Captain Brand would be a grievous mistake; so I hold my tongue.

He points to the one chair in the little

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cabin. It seems as if that stern, firm will of his seats me in it. He draws away, and leans against the door again.

"You poor, dear child," he said, "left alone so young, with no one but a rough fellow like me to care for you; it is very sad, but never mind," his voice has got cheerful at last, "you shall be made as happy as I can possibly make you."

"I never can be happy again." I say this impetuously, and then I feel afraid that I have said too much, but he takes no notice.

"We must make a French port in a few days, and then we will settle your plans. Your dear mother foresaw that she might be taken from you, and she begged me to place you, for a time, with an old French friend of hers, Madame La Peyre. This lady lives in Normandy; I can, therefore, take you to her before we go to England, as the Eclair is bound for Havre. But, if you like instead to go to my mother's, I shall prefer it, and she will love you as if you were her own child."

I got red in an instant. It was so very unkind to make such a proposal. His mother! doubtless an ignorant, ill-bred person, from whom I should have no chance of escape.

"Certainly, I had better go to the lady my mother chose for my guardian. I have heard of Madame La Peyre."

I look up resolutely in Captain Brand's face; he is smiling, and yet I am sure I spoke with dignity.

"He is stupid as well as rough. He cannot understand manners. I must speak out if I want him to know what I mean."

"Very well," he says, "you shall do as you please, though I do not like French people, and I wish you could have been placed in England. I shall come and see you, and remember, my dear child, you must not keep any the smallest trouble from me; write, and tell me every thing." I look displeased; certainly I do not intend to write to Captain Brand.

"I don't ask you to do this"—he smiled again, just as if he saw into my thoughts—"as a task, but only because I can't have you worried or troubled about any thing, and you have no one else to help you."

"You seem to forget my father," I say, very coldly and calmly. I want to show Captain Brand I am not quite such a child as he fancies. "As soon as I land I shall write to my father, and he will give me advice when I need it."

I look up—I hope he is really startled at last; but he is smiling still, and there is the same irritating touch of pity in his face I saw there before.

"Yes; you must write to your father, and *my* first business will be to write to Mr. Stewart. I have a letter to inclose to him, Gertrude, which your mother gave to me on that day, do you remember, when she took me below with her."

Of course I remember; and my old feeling of jealous dislike grows worse. So he got my mother to write exactly what he pleased. My eyes are full of angry tears.

"You can do as you choose, Captain Brand, it makes no difference to me; but my father will probably send for me."

He looks very sadly at me.

"I wish you would trust me, my child; I can't bear distressing you, and yet it is better to tell you that I know that your father will not withdraw you from my protection."

I looked incredulous.

"Well," he says, abruptly, as if he is growing tired; "there is just one more thing to be settled between us: a motherless girl must have a protector of some kind, or she is exposed to endless annoyances. You are too innocent to realize your position, and you must let me care for you, just as if I were your father or your brother. Don't encourage Mr. Rendu to talk to you."

Just the old lecturing voice I remembered on board the "Adelaide."

"I am not in the habit of talking to inferiors;" and then I bite my lips. In the midst of my vexation at his interference, I am ashamed of myself. What would my darling mother have thought of such a speech to a man who is almost as much my inferior as the French mate is?

But Captain Brand is evidently too insensitive to be offended.

"I am sure of it," he says, cheerfully; "then it is a compact; you will trust me for the future, my dear child, and try to believe I am only seeking your real happiness in all I say or do."

And actually he takes both my hands in his and kisses them. I cannot prevent him, he has such a strange, rough power over me; but his look at me as he goes out of the cabin frightens me, it is so intense.

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"I must and will get away from him; I don't feel free while he talks to me; I believe if he were always with me he would talk me into believing he is my husband. No; if I ever do have a husband it shall not be a big, rough, under-bred tyrant of a sailor—oh! oh!"

I shiver from head to foot, and then I break down in a passion of sobs and tears.

CHAPTER VII.

THE JOURNEY.

THERE was such a bustle and noise everywhere that I felt giddy and sick; the smell of the harbor was worse than the noise, and men in blue smock-frocks seemed to be laying violent hands on every thing, shrieking and clamoring in shrill, feminine voices, in a *patois* that scarcely sounded like the French I had been taught in Tasmania by dear old Monsieur Serret. I had been fond of the gentle old professor, and had made up my mind to like French people for his sake, but this first experience of France was discouraging. I felt inclined to cling to Captain Brand, and even when he said, "My dear child," I did not frown.

He put me into a little carriage, and I suppose he went outside it, for there he was at the door, ready to hand me out when we reached the hotel.

It fronted the harbor, and at the door stood a man with a white cloth under his arm, bowing and grinning; he led the way into a long room, which smelt of cheese and tobacco-smoke; a table covered with a coarse white table-cloth reached from one end of the room to the other; several persons sat at it, and one of these, a well-dressed old woman, kept on eating oysters so fast that it seemed to me she must choke; the oysters were huge, and she scooped them out of the shell with a black-handled knife, and put the point of the knife in her mouth with the oyster. Next to her sat a wizened-faced man in a brown wig—he was eating cheese.

"Cheese at breakfast," I thought—"it must be breakfast, for it is only eleven o'clock; these people are savages." They stared so hard at me as I came in that I felt ashamed of my weather-stained appearance.

Captain Brand saw my look of annoyance, and he made our guide show us into a private room. He is certainly very kind—ever since our talk in the cabin he has kept away from me; and, indeed, I staid below, for Monsieur Rendu, presuming, I suppose, on the encouragement I gave, had persecuted me with his compliments when I came on deck again.

To-day I feel quite softened toward Captain Brand. When we had breakfasted, he said:

"We will start as soon as you are ready, and then we shall reach Château Fontaine to-night—I am anxious to see Madame La Peyre—but if you don't take to her you shall not stay with her."

I give him a grateful look.

"I think," he goes on, smiling, "you would like to make a little change in your dress; I had better get you a hat and cloak of some kind—I will be back directly."

I am amused at the notion of Captain Brand's taste in dress; but in a very short time there comes in a shop-woman with a little girl carrying a box and a bag. The woman makes me such a pretty courtesy, and speaks with such an easy, yet respectful manner, that I think her charming. She has a dark, ordinary face; but her hair is so nice, and her long, narrow dark eyes are full of expression.

She opens the box and shows me some hats to choose from—also a very nice traveling-cloak; and then she fits me with gloves. She does every thing so neatly and simply, and yet with such skillful quickness. "Will mademoiselle look at herself in the glass?" she says, smilingly. The sight is electrifying. I seem completely transformed from the brown, shabby-looking girl I had been on board the Eclair. I even feel much more like a lady—clothes have a strange power over our estimate of ourselves. "Thank you, you have made me look very nice," I say, warmly.

"That bag is for mademoiselle"—she is actually on her knees—diligently rubbing my old black silk gown with a bit of flannel, and something she has brought in a bottle. "Monsieur has told me to choose for mademoiselle all that is necessary for the *toilette de nuit* of a young lady, and it is possible that mademoiselle will also wish for something else."

She opens a little box full of charming lace collars and cuffs—the sight of them is

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tempting, but I resist, and say, "No, thank you." Captain Brand told me my mother gave him some money to take care of for me —but I resolve to be prudent, as it may not be a large sum, and I cannot accept any present from him.

The woman looks disappointed, but she says, "Bonjour," and thanks me very politely as she goes away.

I was still looking at myself, admiring my hat, and wondering at the change she had effected, when Captain Brand came in.

"You have forgotten these, will you put them in your bag?"—he has some of those lovely little cuffs and collars in his great brown hand—"you will want them at Château Fontaine—there are no shops there like these Havre shops." He stops and gazes at me—"Ah, now you look like yourself again."

"He is a good old rough bear," I think, "but he is very thoughtful." I thank him graciously, and, as I open the bag to put in the collars and cuffs, I see there all sorts of useful articles.

I fancy Captain Brand means to be my guardian—he sees that we could never be husband and wife. I am glad he is so sensible—he is certainly very kind.

"There is not much to see here besides the shipping," he says, "but we have time for a little walk before our train starts—that is, if you are willing."

So we strolled into the town. The town is unpicturesque, with wide, commonplace streets, and handsome squares. But all the sights and sounds are new to me, and I almost glance with delight at all. Near the harbor there are innumerable parrots and foreign birds in cages, making a most discordant noise. I saw the dresses of the women, their snowy-white caps; then the men, in their blouses, the strange uniform of the soldiers; and the quaint cries from hawkers, selling their wares, kept me in a constant flutter of excitement.

Just outside the hotel we came upon an old woman with a long barrow, covered with golden apricots. Captain Brand buys as many as he can carry, and the old woman laughs, and gives him a gourd-leaf to put them in. How brown her face looks beneath her white stocking-cap; what a net-work of wrinkles her eyes and mouth are set in! She does not seem very old, but when she opens her mouth I see she is toothless.

"Au revoir, mon beau monsieur," she says; "a good appetite, madame; the apricots are of the first quality."

I feel angry at being called madame, but we have come to the pier, and I soon forget every thing in looking at the people bathing, they are so gay and merry, and their costumes are so bright and picturesque.

"How happy every one seems!" I said; "if all French people are as merry, I shall like living in France extremely."

That was certainly a happy walk. Captain Brand walked by me silently, feeding me with apricots, and listening to my chattering remarks with a pleased face, for I felt too excited by the life I saw all round me to be quiet. Those large golden apricots were the best I had ever eaten. For the first time I was natural, and at my ease with Captain Brand.

I cannot tell why I felt so changed, unless the strangeness of all around me had the effect of drawing me close to my fellow-countryman—the only creature I was accustomed to. He looked into a beautiful shop, and bought me a lovely box of chocolate.

"I am afraid we must not go to the top of the hill," he said; "the station lies down yonder." He turned and pointed to the town —he looked sad—and I had grown so fearless that, if I had not had my mouth full of apricot, I think I should have asked him what was the matter.

. . . . . .

We had only one fellow-passenger in the railway-carriage—an old, white-haired gentleman, with a bit of red ribbon in his button hole. He laughed at my bursts of admiration at the scenery we passed through, although he could not speak English, but I can never forget the first part of that journey. On each side of us were orchards filled with fruit-trees, and these were gemmed with downy peaches, and gold and purple and brown and crimson fruit, ripening fast in glowing August sunshine. I thought of the jeweled cave of Aladdin. Aboard ship I had forgotten the time of year, but each mile of our journey printed it in my memory, I might say burned it in, for there was a hue of burning gold over every thing, from the stubble beneath the fruit-trees, where barley had been newly mown, and the deep-hued lichen on the thatch of cottages peeping at rare intervals among the trees. The trees were different from any

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I had seen, so tall and graceful and so varied in form. For some little distance we traveled beside the Seine, and through the trees we saw a tall, graceful spire, which our fellow-traveler said was Harfleur. After this the road was less interesting. We stopped at a town which looked full of manufactories and tall chimneys, but I grew more and more tired, and took less interest in looking at the country. At last I fell asleep.

I awaken with a start. The train has stopped, our fellow-traveler has departed, and Captain Brand is standing at the open door of the carriage speaking to me.

"Is this the château?" I ask, sleepily; "I am so very tired, I long to be in bed."

"No, not yet; this is Yvetôt, we have still some miles to go; come along, my dear," says the kind voice, and then he almost lifts me out of the railway-carriage and puts me into a curious-looking vehicle, on which is written, in huge red letters, "Diligence Caudelier." Captain Brand gets in after me, and then there is a great shouting and cracking of a whip, and we are off again—on a very straight, stony high-road.

The jolting, jogging motion sends me off to sleep very soon. When I wake my cheek rests on something I feel warm and comfortable.

"Awake at last," a voice says, close to my ear.

I open my eyes; it has grown dusk already, but there is light enough to show me that Captain Brand's face is very near to mine, and that I have been asleep on his shoulder.

I start and struggle into a sitting position, but he has wrapped me so warmly in a great rough cloak that I feel in prison.

I try to look dignified, but I am too sleepy, I feel that dignity is tiresome and rather useless. I was so happy just now before I fell asleep. I felt like a little girl of ten traveling with a simple, good-natured guardian. Captain Brand has been very kind to me all day, and, if I fall against his shoulder, he cannot help it, poor man.

He keeps silence, and I look out of the window. We seem to be passing through a forest, the banks rise high on each side, crowned with trees, but we are going down a steep hill, and now, on the right, the road opens and it is lighter, and I see a grand-looking church-spire rising above a town nestling round it. There is a little winding river at the bottom of the valley beside the road.

In few minutes we clatter down a very steep hill, and I see that we are in the street of the town, but it is not light enough to see much, only the houses are very quaint-looking, with sharp-pointed gables, like those I have seen in pictures. We dash through these, come into light again, and stop suddenly.

Captain Brand is out of the *diligence* in an instant.

"You had better wait a few minutes," he says, and I look out of the window again.

We are on a quay, beside a broad, silver river; there is light enough to show me how lovely it must be when one can see it better. Opposite, the bank is fringed by tall, thin trees, which look gray in the gloom; on the left, the river winds out of sight beneath a huge, dark hill; and, on the right, is a lofty, double avenue of trees, the nearest of which almost overshadow the *diligence* as it stands drawn up beside a *café* on the quay.

I observe that there are gay flowers in pots on the *café* windows, and that, on a long bench in front, two women are sitting at needle-work, talking to a man, who smokes a pipe, beside them. It is a happy, quiet, leisurely scene, quite new to me, for I have rarely been out of a large town.

There seems to be a great deal of talk going on around the *diligence*, and two gentlemen, who have got down from the top, point out their luggage to a man in a blouse. He has a wild face, and a mop of red hair, and he beckons them on past the *café* to an archway, on which I see printed "Hôtel de la Marine."

Captain Brand comes to the door.

"The *diligence* does not take us to Château Fontaine, and there is no carriage to be had." He laughs as he speaks. "It has been market-day; there are no *voitures* to be had; I am afraid we shall have to go there in a cart. Will you get out and have something to eat?"

I feel very hungry, so I get out, and we go up the yard to the Hôtel de la Marine. There are stables on one side, and a long shed for carriages on the other. A man in a blouse stands smiling and bowing, and, I believe, is the master. A tall, dark-faced, grim-looking woman receives us very graciously, and we go up-stairs into the *salle à manger*. She seems disappointed when Captain Brand says we do not want rooms, only something to eat.

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"A QUAINT DOUBLE AVENUE OF TREES BESIDE THE QUAY."

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I cannot eat much, I am so delighted with the view of the river from the large, open windows. The moon has risen, and, although her reflection does not reach the river, the effect is exquisite. There is not much light yet in the moon, for the sky is still full of color. Near the dark hills, and just before the river sweeps round so grandly out of sight, it is dark olive; but here, in front, it is a pale yellow, rose-tinted by the warm clouds overhead, which tell of a glorious sunset. Across the water the tall poplars look darker now, and throw a deep shadow into the water below them. I am quite sorry when the girl who has been waiting on us—a pale, dark-eyed, bustling creature, who seems to fly up and down the stairs—opens the glass door of the *salle* with a great slam, and says: "Monsieur et madame, the *voiture* is ready."

When we get to the cart, there is a chair placed beside it; I mount on this, and scramble in; but it is rather awkward, for the cart has such high sides.

There is a bench across with a cushion, and a chair in front for the driver.

Captain Brand places me carefully in one corner, so that I shall not sit next to the driver.

I can hardly see him; but he is a little man, shrill-voiced, and smells strongly of onions.

Captain Brand puts the cloak carefully round me; he is so very kind and gentle, I cannot feel cross with him.

"Thank you so much," I whisper; "you have been very kind to me all day."

Oh, how I wish I had held my tongue! I feel his arm going round the cloak in which he has wrapped me.

"God bless you, my darling, for saying so!"

But he does not keep his arm round me; and he begins to speak at once to the driver—so, after a bit, my angry terror subsides, and his bad French amuses me.

The road soon becomes so interesting that I forget every thing in looking at it. It gets lighter, for the moon has risen up high; and there are lofty cliffs on the right, wooded in parts, but with white limestone crags showing here and there, as the moonlight falls on them. On the left was a monotonous row of pollard willows; but the foliage was so light, and they are planted so widely, that through the stems I see the broad river flowing along beside us. A low-lying meadow comes between the trees and the river. The moon has soon risen so high that her reflection falls broadly across the water, partly in an unbroken silver band, and then in waving circlets of light. As the current disturbs the smooth surface, these circlets spread more widely, for I could feel that the wind was rising.

"V'là la Seine, m'sieur eh dame," our driver squeaks, "eh la barre, qui n'a arrivé."

I do not think Captain Brand understands the shrill squeak, but I long to ask what the barre is.

Suddenly the road widens, and curves round so that the river forms a bay; but the moonlight only glimmers on it. Now, a hazy bank of clouds has mounted up to the moon, and every now and then a fragment of dark vapor passes across her light.

We turn sharply as we reach the farther corner of the bay, and I cry out with delight. On the left there is a huge opening in the white rock, which looks like a black cave, with festoons of ivy, or some other plant, hanging across its mouth; and, on the roadside, bending toward the river, as if some mystic spell drew them there, are about twenty tall, slender, silver birch-trees, waving their wan foliage to the fast-rising storm. The black mass of vapor flings itself suddenly over the moon, and the light comes through in ghostly, partial fragments, now falling on the pale birch-stems, making them yet more weird and mysterious, now on the white limestone crags.

Suddenly an owl flits across the road, cries out sharply, and vanishes into the cave. I shiver, and am glad when the trees become higher and thicker between the road and the river—we seem more sheltered in the darkness. All at once, from far off in the direction we are following, comes a hoarse murmur. We have been going up-hill for some time, and this sound seems to rise toward us; each moment it grows louder and louder, till it becomes a tumultuous, foaming noise, like that of a rushing torrent. I think, amid the din, there are faint human voices calling to one another—Undine's uncle in pursuit of Hildebrand; but suddenly the noise, for one instant, grows deafening, and then the furious water seems to fling itself upward with one mighty leap, and falls thundering on the rocks below.

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Captain Brand looks at the driver.

"What's that?" he says, anxiously.

The small man just points his whip toward the river.

"Ça c'est la barre—c'est fini, m'sieur eh dame."

"Qu'est-ce que c'est la barre?" the captain asked, and listened eagerly for the answer.

The driver stares and shrugs his shoulders.

"C'est le flot, vl'à tout; ça vient demain tout de même"—and then he lashes out at his horses, and settles his pipe in his mouth.

"Nous v'là arrivés," he says, presently, and he drives far more rapidly between a row of small houses which have sprung up on one side, and a high, dead wall on the other; then comes a sudden turn, and we begin to climb slowly a very steep ascent. "V'là le château;" our driver points up with his whip, as if Château Fontaine lay skyward; but it is too dark to see far ahead, and, besides, every thing has put on the same level dim tint, except, indeed, the white road which mounts straight in front.

"V'lá léglise." I lean forward, and make out a spire behind a group of cottages, and a few steps on—where the cottages stood apart so as to leave a wide opening—a low wall, with a tall cross set just within it. I see that our driver pulls off his cap as we pass this.

Five minutes more of slow climbing—during which his cart creaks horribly—and we stop.

The driver gets down and opens a gate; it seems to be a high iron one as it swings back; then he makes an indescribable sound, and the horse moves on.

"I had best call the *concierge* to guide monsieur et madame," the driver said. "It will take a long time to get the cart to the house, and, besides, it is too steep for the horse; by the foot-path monsieur arrives in five minutes."

He drives on a few paces, and then scrambles down again, and leaves us under the trees. They seem very lofty trees to me, and there is the sound of a water-fall not far off. I feel interested and excited, and wish there was more light.

Captain Brand has kept silent so long that I grow impatient.

"Shall I get down," I say, "so as to be ready when he comes back?"

Captain Brand must surely have been asleep, he gives such a start at my voice.

"Wait an instant." And then he sits silent. "Yes, here he comes."

He gets down, and holds out his arm for me. I wish he would let me have a chair instead, and I hesitate.

"Come," he said, and he seemed to take me in his arms in an instant.

I almost fell in scrambling down, I was so anxious to get away from him.

We were in a park full of very large, lofty trees. A man was standing beside our driver with a curious horn lantern in his hand—it had a comical top, like those which one sees in pictures. The man held this up to Captain Brand's face, and I saw his own—such a brown, wrinkled, smooth-skinned old face, it put me in mind of a walnut-shell with two black slits for eyes, and a slit of no color but the original walnut for a mouth. His nose seemed to lie flat on his face. The only obtrusive thing about him was a pair of round gold rings in his great flapping ears.

I suppose he wished us good-evening, but it sounded to me like:

"Ah ça, ah ça, m'sieur et dame—soyez les bien-venus!"

Captain Brand and the driver had a little talk, and then the wagon drove away, and we began to follow our friend with the earrings.

"Take my hand," said the captain, "this road is too rough for you."

But I thought I had accepted help enough.

"Oh no, thank you," and I walked on, trying to widen the distance between us.

We were going up a winding, narrow path, with tall, skinny-looking trees on each side, with lower bushes and seemingly shrubs in front of them, and the road was so uneven and stony that my ankles began to twist.

A sharper twist this time, and I fall down on my face. In an instant I am raised up.

"Are you hurt, my child?"

I can feel that he trembles while he holds me, and his voice has an accent of terror.

"What an old goose he is!" I laugh out. "Oh, no, thank you; but perhaps I had better take your arm."

I like this better than letting him hold

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my hand in his. I don't mean to give him a chance of kissing my hand again; but, indeed, I believe he has changed his mind, and I may feel at my ease. His manner is much more like a father's than a lover's. I think he is like an old woman in the care he takes of me. After all, I am glad he is here. I am sure to like Madame La Peyre, but it would have been very hard to make this journey alone, and introduce myself at Château Fontaine.

Captain Brand was thinking, too, I suppose, or the increasing steepness of the winding path took away his breath. He did not speak till the bobbing light in front stood still, a little way above us. We followed up some steps on to a level space.

Then came a great barking of dogs, and a rattling as if a chain were being unfastened, and then light gleamed out of an open doorway at the top of a double flight of steps, and I saw we were on a broad terrace in front of a large house.

"Stay here a moment," and Captain Brand left me alone with the walnut-faced jack-o'-lantern. I felt nervous when I saw his tall figure disappear in the light that filled the door-way. I began to try and make out what sort of a place Château Fontaine was.

There seemed to be two rows of straight, narrow windows, and over these a very high roof, only standing back a little way, with two rows of projecting windows with peaked tops coming out of it. I had never seen windows like these, and, as far as I could make out, I thought them very picturesque. The terrace went straight along the front, and there did not seem to be trees beyond it, and it was much lighter than if it had been down below. I could not see any attempt at a carriage-sweep or a garden. The wooded hill we had been climbing lay just behind us, and there was a grassed descent on each side, which looked very steep indeed.

"These people are not much," I thought —"they do not even keep a carriage. I shall be buried alive, I'm afraid."

But here comes Captain Brand. He is quiet again now. All his expansive manner has left him.

"Madame La Peyre is away from home, Gertrude, but her brother, an old abbé, will be very happy to see you. Will you come this way?"

A sudden chill falls on my anticipations; I feel shy and miserable.

I follow through the hall, which is so dark and slippery that I nearly fall again, up a very short, wide, black staircase, also very slippery. This is lighter, for the man who opened the door has taken the light from the sconce in the hall, and is holding it over the quaint, twisted balusters. We go along a gallery with a great window in it at the head of the stairs, turn a corner, along another gallery, still bordered by stair-rails on one side and with closed doors on the other, to an open door at the end.

And old gentleman, in a long, black dress, stands near the door; he makes me a low bow.

"Mademoiselle is very welcome, and I must ask her to accept me as her host in the absence of my sister, Madame La Peyre."

Then he shakes hands with as much reverence as if I were the queen, and leads me up to the fireplace.

There is a wood-fire in the wide, bare-looking place, and the strangeness, I suppose, has made me feel chilly, or I am shyly glad of something to do. I bend over the fire and warm my hands.

"Mademoiselle is cold," says the abbé; in a minute I hear a bell ring, and the man who showed us up-stairs comes in.

I had not seen him before, but some wax-candles were on a table near the door, and I looked at him.

He had a young, half-finished face, very little hair on his head, and a receding chin; his coat was too large and too loose, his trousers too short and narrow—he seemed to belong to some one else instead of himself.

"Mathieu," said Monsieur l'Abbé, in the same suave voice in which he spoke to me, "some hot chocolate at once, and then tell Rosalie she is wanted."

The chocolate did not come directly, and I sat looking at the fire—I was too timid to look at the abbé.

"I remember Madame Stewart," said the suave voice; "but she was not Madame Stewart when I saw her; she was young, and her name was Tyrell, and her mother was Lady Susan Tyrell."

I gave the abbé a friendly nod, and looked up at him; it was pleasant to hear my moth-

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er's position asserted before a stranger like Captain Brand; and, as I looked, I saw that the abbé was younger than I expected, and very good-looking.

I was just thinking what lovely gray hair he had, and what a pity it was all shaved off the top of his head, when another door opened in the dark, out-of-sight part of the room. It was so large a room that the fire and the two wax-candles only lit up our corner of it; and this was comfortably shut in by some huge black-and-gold screens, so that the rest of the great, rambling place was invisible.

Just then I looked at Captain Brand; he was frowning as he had frowned at Monsieur Rendu on board the Eclair.

But footsteps were coming across the slippery parquet; there was no carpet on the floor; and the next minute a gentleman came round from behind the screen against which I sat.

Our eyes met, and seemed fascinated—surely I had seen this face in my dreams: dark, intense eyes; a white forehead, with brown, shining hair clustering in curls over it; a full, red-lipped mouth; and a long, straight nose. He was not very tall, but he was graceful and well made, and I noticed, as he came into the light, how small and white his hands were. I had seen engravings from Vandyck, and this was like a Vandyck portrait.

"Ah, my pupil," said the abbé, "I had forgotten; I must present you to Mademoiselle Stewart, and to her guardian, Monsieur the Capitaine Brand. This, mademoiselle, is my pupil, Monsieur le Comte de Vaucresson."

The new-comer had not taken his eyes from my face, and I felt I was standing under his intense gaze.

I had begun to make a low courtesy in answer to his deep, reverential bow; but my courtesy got lower at the mention of his title.

A glow of pleasure came over me, and then a quick feeling of shame that this high-born gentleman should find me in the companionship of a man like Captain Brand.

CHAPTER VIII.

AT CHÂTEAU FONTAINE.

Till now I had secretly rejoiced in Madame La Peyre's absence. After just the first few moments I had felt so perfectly sure of getting on well with that mild-voiced, handsome old abbé, but now, without any cause or warning either, I suddenly lost all self-possession. I felt like a shy school-girl. Every time I looked up those glowing dark eyes met mine in a way that told me they never left me. If I had doubted this fact, Captain Brand's face would have confirmed it — he looked so vexed and troubled. When I saw this, I felt less shy and I smiled.

"Jealous old crosspatch!" and all my feelings toward him came back.

Mathieu came in, carrying a silver salver, with a chocolate-pot, a cream-jug, and a sugar-bucket in antique silver, and there were two quaint cups and saucers. The vicomte went forward and met him half-way; he poured out my chocolate and handed it to me with a grace I had never seen in any man before. How delicious that cup of chocolate was!

"How well he must dance!" and then I ventured a little look up again; "we will try on this parquet to-morrow," I thought.

I could not help looking mischievously at Captain Brand. It will be great fun if he finds me dancing with the comte. I don't fancy he ever danced in his life before, poor old bear.

He was not looking at me; he was studying the face of Monsieur de Vaucresson with a very displeased look.

"Very rude to stare so!" and then I could not help laughing at my own perverseness.

A tap at the door, and the abbé said, "Come in."

There came in a middle-aged woman, freckled and sandy-haired, with small, light eyes, wide apart. She wore a cap with a pointed crown, and a muslin bow tied in front. She had on a short, dark-blue skirt, and a black stuff jacket, the front hidden by the square bib of her brown apron.

The abbé asked if the rooms were ready, and then he turned to me.

"Mademoiselle is tired, I'm sure."

"She must be tired." I did not think Captain Brand could speak so quickly. "She will be glad to go to bed."

I tried to say I was not tired, but the abbé went on before I could get out my words.

"Yes, yes; and, Rosalie, you will see that

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mademoiselle has every thing she can require. —Good-night, mademoiselle, I have the honor to wish you a good sleep."

He took my hand in his and led me to the door, before Captain Brand had time to wish me good-night.

Monsieur de Vaucresson, however, had reached the door before we did, and held it open with another graceful bow, but he did not seem to expect me to shake hands.

I followed this short, sturdy Frenchwoman along the slippery gallery, in a very discontented temper.

"The abbé and Captain Brand are a pair of old busy-bodies. Why should I be sent to bed just as the evening was beginning? I only meant to come up and put myself straight, and then go down and talk to Monsieur le Comte. How delightful that he lives here! I felt my cheeks flush. Oh, how I wish to-morrow would come!"

At home I had read in novels about French châteaux, and it seemed to me that, so far, all I had seen had been fairly pictured forth, but I felt disappointed when Rosalie opened a door in the gallery, and led the way up a narrow corkscrew staircase, so warped and uneven that I nearly fell down the stone steps.

"Take the cord." Rosalie looked over her shoulder, and held up the small brass lamp she carried; then I saw a rope fastened against the outside wall, but so dirty-looking that I preferred to stumble on without it.

Presently we emerged in a long gallery overlooking the great staircase by which we had reached the drawing-room. I looked down and saw Mathieu far below, sitting asleep on the stairs; a feeble lamp was going out beside him.

Rosalie looked too. "Paresseux vaurien," she muttered.

I began to feel low-spirited and gloomy, I seemed so far away from every one.

Just then Rosalie stopped before a door, and opened it.

"The bedroom of mademoiselle." She courtesied, and then went in and lit another brass lamp.

I looked round in surprise; this was not a bit like the bedrooms I had read about; it had a high ceiling which sloped, and I saw that the window had a seat in it; the walls were whitewashed; on one of them was a whitewashed bass-relief of horses and dogs; there was no carpet on the floor, and in front of the fireplace there stood a small stove; but I could see that there was a glowing fire in this, and the room felt warm and comfortable; there was a French bedstead without any hangings; a dark-looking table, on which Rosalie set down her lamp; and, behind this, fixed against the wall, a looking-glass, made up of square and diamond-shaped bits of glass leaded together; two chairs, covered with dull brown leather, and on one of them a jug and basin, and towel; no window-curtains, no toilet-cover, not a luxury of any kind.

"Does mademoiselle require any thing else?" Rosalie held the lamp up to my face, with a very self-satisfied look on her own.

I thought the question very unnecessary; it seemed to me that I wanted every thing, but something in her face checked me, she looked so evil.

"I want some hot water, and my bag." Rosalie shrugged her shoulders.

"Ah, for the bag, yes, Mathieu should bring it to mademoiselle tout de suite; but for the hot water, it is different, the last was used for the chocolate, and the fire is out, and mademoiselle will have to wait so long before the water will be hot."

There was a look of sly obstinacy in Rosalie's small light eyes, peering at me through pale lashes.

"Very well," I said.

"Bonsoir, mam'selle, dormez bien." I listened to the pattering of her feet on the stairs, and then I felt very lonely.

It was a comfort when Mathieu's shrill voice asked through the keyhole if he might come in with my bag; but he was gone again in an instant.

"I can't go to bed, there's not even a bolt to the door; and that is not a key-hole, only a hole; there is no lock to the door; oh, I shall be frightened to death before morning."

I wrapped my cloak round me, and sat down close to the stove. I could not make up my mind to undress and go to bed. But I was so tired that I soon began to nod. I seemed to be down-stairs talking to the comte, and all at once I started awake; a dull, lumbering sound was growing more and more distinct.

I stood up, listening in such terror that my hair was lifted from my forehead — the heavy tread was coming nearer, nearer, till it stopped at my door.

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"Gertrude, are you asleep?"

I did not think I could ever have been so glad to hear Captain Brand's voice. I opened the door at once.

"I have not been to bed; I don't know what to do; I am so frightened at being up here," and then I was ashamed of my cowardice.

"I don't wonder," he spoke so gently. "I thought, perhaps, you would be frightened in this lonely place, and I asked the abbé to let me have this room next yours. You will go to bed and sleep now, won't you, my dear child? Remember, I am close by. Good-night."

He held my hand so lingeringly, and looked at me so kindly, that I drew it away. I never even said "Thank you;" I only gaped.

"I am so sleepy; good-night," and I shut the door before he turned to go into his room.

"He is very good-natured, and I am ungracious," I thought, reproachfully. "He is very like a great, affectionate old dog—it *is* comfortable to feel he is so near."

And then I got into bed as fast as I could, and dreamed of Monsieur de Vaucresson.

CHAPTER IX.

LE COMTE DE VAUCRESSON.

I WAS wakened by Rosalie. She stood by my bedside with a cup of coffee in her hand.

"Is it very late?" I spoke English.

She laughed and shook her head.

"No Engleesh"—then, in French, "It is eight o'clock, ma'mselle."

I sent her away. I took great pains in dressing myself. I brushed my gown with a dear little brush I found in my bag; and fastened on one of the pretty lace collars. "They are too good to wear in the morning, but then I have nothing else."

I took extra pains with my hair. In those days I had an abundance of long, dark, very dark hair, with a bright auburn tinge underneath, where it waved off my temples, and yet, when I had woven it into glossy dark plaits round my head, I looked at myself in the glass and sighed.

"Ah, how different I look to Monsieur de Vaucresson—he cannot care for me when he is so beautiful himself!"

I had only a clear brown skin; my black eyebrows were so straight and thick; my nose was inclined to turn up at the end, and my upper lip curved up too.

I had a little mouth, I knew that, and my lips were very red; but I had such great, staring, dark eyes, of what color I never could tell. Now, in the morning, they looked a greenish-gray; in the evening they were a velvet-brown. I was not fond of my own eyes, they so often got me into trouble. Jane, my eldest sister, was always scolding me for "throwing my eyes at people," as she called it; but, then, Jane has pretty little quiet blue eyes. I suspect she would find big ones like mine tiresome to manage. Jane is small altogether. I am so much taller and larger that I ought to have large eyes.

After some wandering I found my way to the room we were in last night. It was empty, and I did not know where to go.

There were two doors at each end of the last room. It looked dismal in the morning light—the great space of bare floor with only a few small rugs in front of the sofas and easy-chairs; the scarcity of furniture; the discolored ceiling—once painted in fresco, but now a confusion of sky and distorted figures and cornucopias; the dark-paneled walls—gave a desolate, lonely gloom to the place I had thought so cozy overnight. Even the folding-screens, which had shone in the firelight, now looked dull and cracked, and the gold goblins on them were hideous.

"I must try and find out where they are breakfasting," for I was quite unused to French customs, and I thought the abbé had sent me up a cup of coffee from the breakfast-table. I tried the doors on the fireplace side of the room; both were fastened, and so was that the farther side, nearest the door by which I had entered. But the fourth opened at once; there was a huge screen in front of it. I passed round this, and found myself close to Monsieur de Vaucresson.

He was taking a book from a shelf, for the room I had got into was surrounded by book-shelves, which reached from the floor to the ceiling; he started as much as I did, but he recovered himself at once.

"Bonjour, mademoiselle;" how charmingly he bowed, but then he stared at me so intently I was obliged to look down! I saw this morning that he was older than I thought him last night.

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"I want to find the breakfast-room, I believe I am very late."

He smiled, and pointed to a china clock on a little black shelf, covered with quaint plates and cups.

"On the contrary, mademoiselle is an early riser. The breakfast here is not served till twelve o'clock; will mademoiselle sit down and wait here, or would she prefer to walk in the garden?"

"Is there a garden? I did not know it. If monsieur will tell me how to find it, I should like to go there."

He laughed and shook his head.

"To go by the public way would fatigue mademoiselle; one has to traverse the park to arrive at the gardens; and the private way would be too difficult to find alone. Mademoiselle must therefore permit me to guide her."

I felt very happy, but I tried not to appear so.

"Thank you, if you have time."

I looked at the books and papers on the table.

He laughed and gathered up the papers in a heap, and took up a hat from beside them.

"There is no lack of time here; I cannot find occupation enough; I shall be delighted to take a walk."

He turned to the other end of the long, narrow room, and I wondered how he was going to get out, for I saw on all sides only shelves filled with books. There was one stained glass window, and opposite this a fireplace, over which were the black shelves filled with curiosities, which I had previously noticed. Monsieur de Vaucresson went on to the end of the room, opposite the door by which I had come in. He took a book from one of the shelves, and a door opened, where just before I had seen only books.

He looked round to see if I followed, and then went down a twisting staircase, exactly like that which I had gone up on the previous night, except that instead of the dirty rope there was a twisted red cord.

"This is delightful," I said to myself, "as good as the 'Arabian Nights.' Captain Brand will not be able to find me."

At first the staircase was lighted by little slits in the walls, but these left off as we got lower; and in the pitchy darkness I got giddy and frightened. I stood still at last and clung to the cord.

"Will mademoiselle give me her hand?" I did not think the comte was so close beside me. "If one turns giddy here there is a great danger of falling, and these steps we are coming to are broken and unsafe."

He found my hand and held it firmly in his. How different his hand was to Captain Brand's! it felt like velvet, and yet I could not have drawn mine away, he clasped it so tightly.

"How strange it is I don't like Captain Brand to touch me! and I like the comte to keep my hand. I wonder why. I suppose it is because he is my equal."

At last he stood still, and I heard that he was unlocking a door.

I was very glad to be in sunlight again; there was a damp, unwholesome atmosphere in that staircase.

It was not a garden we had reached. It was a paved yard, with some pretty hens and chickens running about, and among these, grunting and grubbing between the stones, and in stray corners, were some of the longest-legged, dirtiest pigs I had ever seen.

I looked at Monsieur de Vaucresson, "But—I don't call this a garden," and then, for I felt shy of my French, "can you speak English?"

"No, and even if I could I would not give up the pleasure of listening to you, mademoiselle. You cannot think how charmingly you speak our language." And then he went on with a heap of compliments, which from an Englishman would have disgusted me, but which sounded delightful from him, he turned them so gracefully.

But my cheeks were growing hot, and he stood leaning against the door, which he had locked again.

"You promised to show me the garden," I said. Perhaps it was his praise of my French, but I did not feel so shy now.

He bowed, but he looked vexed.

"Mademoiselle is anxious to be rid of a troublesome companion."

I did not want him to go, but certainly I did not mean to let him know I cared for his presence.

"I never said so," and I looked up. I fancy I looked very mischievous.

"Ah! but, mademoiselle, it is not only by words that one speaks."

"Perhaps not in France, but in England we always say what we mean."

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He smiled.

"Then mademoiselle will perhaps tell me in words whether she wishes me to stay with her."

I felt caught in a trap. I looked up, but the comte was not laughing at all; he looked imploring.

"We will settle about that when we really reach the garden," and I walked across the yard. "No, I will not be managed by Monsieur de Vaucresson, or by Captain Brand either; I will manage myself. I know, if I give way ever so little, how soon people can influence me."

He followed me across the yard, and opened a high black gate at the farther end of it. Two of those hideous pigs tried to squeeze through the gate with me, but he drove them back.

"Don't beat them so hard," I said.

He only laughed—cruelly, I thought.

"Pigs and peasants understand best through their hides, mademoiselle; they must feel the word of command before they can hear it."

"We don't think so among English people."

"Mademoiselle must make excuse for my French education." He smiled so sweetly that I felt as if I would make excuse for any thing.

This black gate let us into a cabbage-garden; cabbages of all shapes and sizes were growing thickly together. There was nothing else, except in one corner of square ground a plot of sweet-smelling herbs, bordered with lavender, and, on the sunny side of the wall which surrounded the garden, apricot-trees, with tomatoes between them.

"Is this the garden?" I felt horribly disappointed, and I must have looked disappointed too.

"I had begun to think mademoiselle was an angel, but I see she is human—she is impatient. No, mademoiselle, there is a flower-garden, and we will go and find it."

He was laughing at me, and I looked grave directly.

"I cannot stay any longer, I think, monsieur; l'abbé and Captain Brand may be looking for me."

Monsieur de Vaucresson fixed his eyes on mine with such a keen look of inquiry that I felt puzzled.

"But it is not possible that the gentleman I saw last night has any authority over mademoiselle."

The blood rushes up to my face. If the comte only knew that I am actually married to this man he speaks of in such a slighting voice! But I am not really married, at least I mean to break through this absurd idea and go back to my father. No one shall ever know that secret; there is only one living witness—Mr. Howard, and we left him ill aboard the Eclair; he was going to the south of England, and perhaps we shall never hear of him again.

"He has no authority over me," and then I look saucy. "I don't think men ever rule women. Captain Brand is my fellow-traveler; he has very kindly come out of his way to bring me here, so I am bound to be civil to him."

This was true, for I knew how anxious the captain was to report the loss of the Adelaide, and how ill he could spare the time he had bestowed on me.

Monsieur de Vaucresson smiles, and then he goes on quickly in front and opens a door in the wall. This door is half hidden by a plot of huge sunflowers, which hold themselves up to the sunshine overhead, like bronze and golden shields.

"Voilà, mademoiselle!" and he stands aside to let me pass in.

We are in a small garden filled with beds of the primmest shape; there is a sundial in the middle, and the paths are made of broken slate. A clipped yew-hedge shuts the garden in all round, except just in the front.

Through this opening I look down a sheer descent of about eighty feet. It is thickly clotted with hazel-bushes. At the bottom is a narrow, winding river, so narrow that it is more like a brook. The opposite side of the valley is not quite so steep, it is grassed, but there are groups of large forest-trees at intervals. Among the trees are old gray statues, and the grassed bank looks as if there had been terraces one above another. Lower down to the right the river turns abruptly, and goes out of sight behind the hill on which we stand and the tall trees which meet across it just where it disappears. Looking down the stream to the left I see a bridge, a fanciful modern construction of twisted wood.

"The view is very pretty, but why is not the garden joined to the house?"

"The house was very much larger, and it

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may have reached to hereabouts. I fancy two-thirds of it were destroyed in the Revolution, and the abbé says that there were terraces on this side of the river also, instead of only cabbage-gardens, but we can soon reach the other side, unless you like the river best."

He points to the bridge, and I see a little boat moored close beside it. The bridge lies in the deep shadow, for there are trees here also, and the sun has not yet risen above the steep bank behind these; in the hazy morning light I had not seen the boat.

I clapped my hands with delight.

"I like boating better than any thing in the world, and I have had so little in my life!"

Monsieur de Vaucresson goes on in front. I begin to think I am rather wild to roam about without a hat, so I tie my handkerchief over my head.

After a bit the path slopes down rapidly among the hazel-bushes, and we soon reach the bridge. The comte turns and takes my hand.

"Ah, how charming is mademoiselle in gypsy costume!"

I blush, and he guides me down some rough steps, with the most devoted care, and then places me in his little boat, jumps in himself, and pushes it off with a skill which I think wonderful.

Monsieur de Vaucresson lets the boat drift down-stream till we come to the turn, and then he takes one scull only as he sits looking at me.

It is not natural to me to be serious; I always find something to laugh about, even in disasters, and these last few weeks of my life have burdened my spirits grievously. Something in the fresh, morning air, and the presence of a young companion, makes me feel joyous and happy, as I have not felt since I said good-by to my father and my sisters in Van Diemen's Land.

I begin to laugh.

He flushes slightly.

"Why does mademoiselle laugh? My way of rowing is different from that which she has seen in England," he says, in a vexed voice.

"I always laugh when I am happy; but you have not begun to row, and I have not been in England since I was four years old."

He looks interested.

"But mademoiselle is surely English?"

"Yes, but I have lived in Tasmania. I was coming home to live in England, and my mother died."

I feel very sad as I say this, and he looks troubled.

"Ciel! And is mademoiselle then traveling to England alone?"

He looked shocked now as well as troubled.

"I came here to find Madame La Peyre, an old friend of my mother's; but I am not alone. I have Captain Brand, the captain of the ship I traveled in, to take care of me."

I blush, for I am not speaking the whole truth, and yet how can I say I am married to Captain Brand. The comte must look down upon him.

His next words make me glad I have been so careful.

"Mademoiselle must forgive me, but it seems strange to see her in companionship with such an unpolished person. I am not used to Englishmen; are they all like Captain Brand?"

"Oh! no, no," I laugh. "He is not an English gentleman; he is only the captain of the ship we sailed in; I did not know him before."

And then my cheeks burn hotly; I recall the captain's little kindnesses, and then I am ashamed of my own pride.

The comte's lip curls.

"Oh! indeed. I am grieved that mademoiselle has had such an unsuitable guardian; but now she is free of him, mademoiselle will stay here till Madame La Peyre comes back."

This is a new idea—a delightful one; I feared we should set out to-morrow or next day to find Madame La Peyre in her Devonshire home, but, of course, I had better stay here and release Captain Brand from his care of me. An uneasy twinge about his power of control comes to me, but I look up in my companion's face and take courage.

"I will write to my father to-day, and, until I get his answer, I refuse to submit to Captain Brand."

I am so silent settling this that the comte gets impatient.

"You have not fulfilled your promise, mademoiselle." I am glad he has left off talking to me in the third person; it makes me feel so far off. "You said you would tell

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me in words whether you wished me to stay with you."

He smiled and looked as if he were sure of my answer.

"How can I say any thing else? I dare say you can't swim; if I say 'No,' and you leave me, you must drown."

I laughed.

He stood up in the boat in an instant.

"I am ready to take the risk."

"Please sit down." I laughed at his serious face. "I can't bear the boat to rock."

He sat down.

"Mademoiselle, I have not yet decided whether English ladies say what they mean any more than French ones do."

He was laughing at me; I knew that, though he kept a grave face.

"Do you know many French ladies?"

"Old ladies, yes; young ladies, not any. Mademoiselle, when I came into the room last night, I felt in heaven."

"Did you, really? But have you not any sisters or cousins?"

I looked at him and he looked at me, and we both burst out laughing. I don't know why we laughed.

I suppose we both felt so happy. It was so delightful drifting along under the shade of the trees, so tall that the water was a blue-green, from their reflection with the bright golden sunshine overhead.

"Yes, I have sisters and cousins; but they are all in convents, being taught by the nuns, and the chief thing they learn is, that they must not be friends with their brothers or cousins. I cannot tell you how much I want a friend."

"Do you?" and then we looked at each other again.

"You have plenty of friends."

He seemed to speak quite shyly; poor fellow, if he could have known how ready I was for his friendship!

"I had plenty of friends at home," I said, and then I sighed—I hope at my own falsehood, for I had not left one real friend behind me, except a poor old blind woman who was once my nurse.

The comte took the sculls, and we went on again more rapidly.

How well he rows! I do not think he could do any thing awkwardly.

"Mademoiselle"—he holds both sculls in one of his delicate hands, which look too small to grasp them; with the other he pushes the curls off his white forehead—"we shall have to live under the same roof perhaps for a year. Will it not be better to be friends?"

"I did not know we were enemies."

"You are hard on me; but how can you be my friend when I do not even know your name?"

"You never asked me for it, what it was." I laughed at him again—he sat there looking so sentimental. "I know yours, and, Monsieur de Vaucresson, we are drifting into a great willow-tree."

He began to scull again, but he had to back water for several strokes before we were extricated, the willow-tree stretched so far across the water.

"You do not know my whole name—I am Eugène Adolphe Théodore Marie Bénoit Louis Félix de Vaucresson."

I bowed reverentially.

"Do you know, I feel quite frightened at such an array? Why, I have only two silly little names—I am Gertrude Lucy Stewart." For the first time came, as I said the surname, the thought to me, was it my name any longer?

He sculled on again rapidly.

"Yours are simple and beautiful names. Will you tell me your age, as well as your name? I am twenty."

"No older? Oh, I am so glad! I like you much better now. You are only three years older than I am, and you know that a woman is always older than a man. But are you sure you are only twenty?"

I looked doubtfully at his full-grown mustache.

"I could not deceive mademoiselle"—this in his old, formal manner.

Then he laughed, and jumped up in the boat, pushing it inshore.

"We must land now, I think. Which may I call you, mademoiselle, Gertrude or Lucie? in France friends do not call each other monsieur or mademoiselle."

"Don't they?" The idea was pleasant, only I found myself wondering for a moment what Jane would think of such familiarity. Nonsense! did I not say just now no one should control me but myself? I am quite old enough to know right from wrong. "Well, then, if you call me Gertrude, by which of your seven names shall I call you?"

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"Whichever you please." He looked so delighted that I was inclined to repent my confidence. "The abbé calls me Eugène."

"Then I will call you Eugène; and now please let me get out"—for the boat is struggling against the forced position in which he holds it, rocking and wriggling most uncomfortably.

I have been so interested that I have not had eyes for any thing but the comte. I see now that we have circled round the base of the lofty height on which the château stands, and have left it behind us. We are now in the valley facing the gate by which we came in last night, and on the park-side the bank is flat and level with the water.

"We cannot get any farther, the stream is so shallow, and Joseph, the old *concierge*"—he points to a cottage close by—"would come after us."

He holds out his hand to help me, but, when I put mine in it, he holds my fingers fast instead of helping me out.

"Gertrude"—he says it in such a pretty, broken way—"in England, I believe, you shake hands on friendship?"

"Yes;" and then I look down—he is staring so intently at me.

He presses my hand tightly. "In France, when we take a woman's hand we kiss it." He kisses my hand. The river runs along here like a luminous reen thread, level with the swampy grass. I push past him, and jump on land, my cheeks burning and my heart throbbing fast. I run along under the tall, gloomy trees, till, all at once, I run nearly into Captain Brand's arms.

There is a thunder-cloud in his face; he did not even say "Good-morning."

"We are late for breakfast, are we not?" I spoke as coolly as possible. "Please ask the abbé not to wait, Captain Brand; I shall soon be ready." And then I run along the path which I saw must lead back to the house.

CHAPTER X.

A DISAPPOINTMENT.

The path went on over the damp grass, shadowed by groups of trees. As I looked up at them, there was no escape from the all-pervading green atmosphere. In front of the river I saw the little cottage of the *concierge*, and this also had green doors and green shutters, in staring contrast to its whitewashed walls.

My path lost itself presently in the thick grass; on the right I saw another track disappearing round the densely-wooded hill, which rose perpendicularly in front of me; on the left was the same steep hill, but there were no trees; it was grassed up to the summit.

I remembered how the path through the trees had turned and twisted last night, and I thought the steep, straight climb would be quickest; but I had not realized its steepness. It took me a long time to climb, and I was breathless by the time I reached the top.

Mathieu stood on the terrace, on the look-out.

"Mamzelle, breakfast waits." He said this in his shrillest voice, and suddenly vanished.

"Mathieu," I shrieked, in a despairing voice; "but where is the breakfast?"

I expected that Captain Brand would have followed me closely, and I want to be safe under that dear old abbé's wing before he appears. I know I can make that dear gentleman do all I want.

But Mathieu is either deaf or shy.

I run up the steps; the hall is not large and gloomy this morning. There are three doors, one in front, and one on each side. I choose that on the left.

I find myself in a long, dark passage, with gratings on one side.

"How horribly damp this house is!" I draw back out of the close atmosphere into the hall again.

Outside, with the comte, was joyous freedom; inside, the house seems a dungeon.

"If the weather could always be warm, and we could live the whole day in the sunshine, how bright life would be!"

Just then Rosalie comes out of the door I had opened.

"Tiens, tiens, tiens, we could not tell what had become of mademoiselle, and here is Monsieur l'Abbé, who breakfasts alone; does not mademoiselle wish to breakfast?"

"Yes; but I do not know my way."

Rosalie only shrugs her shoulders. She seems always resolved to put me in the wrong. She throws open the door in front; this also leads into a passage, but a wide, airy one; she opens some double doors at the end, and here is the *salle*.

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It is a grand room as to size, with windows down to the ground on one side, screened with muslin curtains; there is a huge fireplace at each end. Only a small part of the long, narrow table is covered by a cloth; there is no tea or coffee, only wine in two old, quaint flagons, and some glasses with twisted stems and spiral-curving bells; there are two dishes on the table, besides fruit and cheese. It seems to me more like luncheon than breakfast.

The abbé rises from table as I come in.

"Ah, my dear young lady, I am glad you are come at last; these sand-eels are spoiling, and I do not think you have sand-eels in Australia. We very seldom get them here at this time of year." He lifts the cover of a dish near him, and I see something very like fried worms lying in a heap.

"I am sorry to be so late, monsieur; but I have been in the garden, and I have been in the boat with Monsieur de Vaucresson." I want to tell him myself, and I blush.

But the abbé is carving a *vol-au-vent*, he is not looking at me.

"I honor your industry and courage," he says, simply; "I am sure my pupil has had pleasure in showing you the beauties of Château Fontaine."

"What a dear old man he is! He thinks there is no harm in my amusing myself with a boy of twenty."

I eat my breakfast, and chat with the abbé; he has been a great traveler, and his remarks about England and English people amuse me extremely.

"But you are on your way to one of the loveliest English counties," he says.

I look up in surprise. I am on the point of saying, I prefer to remain at Château Fontaine, when in comes Captain Brand.

I understand now; he has seen the abbé already this morning, for he seats himself in silence, with a very gloomy look on his face.

It is he who is the dungeon, not the house. I felt happy and cheerful alone with the abbé; now it is all restraint and dullness.

But I begin to remember that this cannot last long. Captain Brand will be going away in two days perhaps, so I may as well be civil to him. I always like to keep friends with every one, and he cannot help having a dull nature.

I rouse up from my thoughts; he is talking to the abbé.

"Yes, I fancy by the day after to-morrow Miss Stewart will have recovered from her fatigue." I look at him with wondering eyes, and then at the abbé.

"I shall write to my sister to-day"—the abbé smiles at me—"and prepare her to receive her charming visitor."

I must speak now at once; of course I have only to say I wish to stay at Château Fontaine, and the abbé will be too pleased to keep me here.

"But, monsieur, if it is not inconvenient to you, I prefer to stay here till Madame La Peyre comes back."

I smile up into the abbé's eyes. I have remarked that when I smile like that I usually get my own way. I wonder why I cannot smile at Captain Brand in the same way—I can't; one might as well try to light a fire with wet wood.

The abbé's face puckers up till he looks quite droll, his eyebrows rise in the middle, and his mouth comes down, and then he shakes his head gravely and smiles at Captain Brand. I am not going to look at the captain; I know what he looks like well enough.

"Have I said any thing strange?" I say, for the abbé's smile disheartens me.

"Mademoiselle is always charming, and I regret much to lose her"—he bows to me as if I were the queen—"but it is better she should go to Madame La Peyre."

"Of course there is nothing else to be done." Captain Brand says this in the stiffest, harshest way.

I do not know how to resist; the abbé does not ask me to stay, and yet how can I leave my friend Eugène without a struggle?

I turn my back on the captain. I want the abbé to see that I am not under the control of any one.

"I am so tired of traveling!" I look beseechingly. "I so hoped I might stay here!"

The abbé shrugs his shoulders very slightly, but he keeps on smiling. It appears to me that all French people shrug their shoulders when they say disagreeable things.

"It would be delightful if you could remain," he said, "but, my dear young lady, I should not dare, in my sister's absence, to undertake so precious a charge. I hope Madame Dayrell's illness may soon yield to

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nursing, and then we shall see you all back here again."

"Shall you be here when we come?" I can hardly speak; tears come into my eyes, but I will not let Captain Brand see them—he is looking at me. It is strange how strong a dislike I feel for him this morning.

"That is uncertain, but still it is possible. Mademoiselle, if you will not eat any more breakfast, I will take you to a pleasanter room."

I am just going to say I prefer the garden, and then I remember my letter to my father; yes, I will write that letter at once. I will tell him how much I dislike Captain Brand, and what an inferior person he is, and then I am sure my father will send for me home.

"Thank you," I say to the abbé, and then I follow up-stairs. It is some comfort that Captain Brand has the sense to stay behind. He sees I do not want him; I shall have far too much of his society on our journey to Devonshire.

The abbé throws open the door of the room we were in last night, and I feel happier.

Eugène must come back to his lessons presently; he left all his papers about, and his room leads out of this one.

The abbé bustles about; he opens a most quaint, old-fashioned square piano, which I had not before noticed. He produces some dingy-looking books from a recess full of shelves, and then he asks me how I mean to employ my morning.

"I am going to write a letter to my father, monsieur." I do not know what caused it, but such a lonely sense of desolation comes to me, that I begin to cry.

"My dear child! my poor, dear child!"—the kind old man lays his hand on my head. "What is your grief? Ah, it is sad at your age to be thrown among strangers!—but you will be happy with my sister."

I take his hand and kiss it.

I fancy this surprises him, for he goes off to the other end of the room.

He comes back after a bit with a china inkstand and two old pens, and a writing portfolio, and then he departs, after asking me if I have all I want. Ah, how delightful is a courteous manner!

I look at the door of Eugène's study, and then I dry my eyes.

I shall not open that door; Eugène can easily find me if he wants me. I sit down to write, but I give abundant signs of my presence by coughing and scraping my chair backward and forward on the waxed floor.

I fancied it would be so easy to write this letter to my father, but I cannot manage it. I have begun, and then my pen gets thick—or perhaps it may be the ink. I sit turning all my *ee*'s into Greek *ee*'s to gain time. I have still a trick of doing this when my ideas do not flow readily. It is so startling to see the words written down: "I am married to Captain Brand;" it makes my marriage a fact, and all this time I have considered it as only an idea, which can be set aside. Well, but what makes people man and wife? Going to church and being married. I did not go to church; this is a comforting thought. I do not think a marriage in a room or on board ship can be as binding as a marriage in church. Ah, but kings and queens are often married in rooms. I think—I am afraid there is something in the service which makes it binding.

I hardly remember the service. I jump up and get a prayer-book, and then remember I am in France. I have a prayer-book with me, but only a little one, without any of those unnecessary services in it. I wish there had been no big prayer-book on board the Adelaide, and then this miserable marriage would not have happened. Well, suppose that I am really married, people can get divorced, I know that—but then I fancy they must both be consenting parties. I don't believe Captain Brand will ever consent. My best chance against him is to get papa to send for me; even Captain Brand will be afraid of papa; he will be quite cowed when papa writes and rebukes him for the base advantage he took of my mother's illness. Yes, it was true Captain Brand is kind in some ways, but he was horribly selfish to marry me—it is most unjust and tyrannical that he should dislike to see me happy with other people. I remark that each time I have tried to shake off my sorrow, and seem bright and gay, he has frowned and has been cross. I never shall be happy with him, I can tell him, and I never mean to try to be. I would not live with him if there were no one else in the world.

No, it just comes back to the same thing—is my marriage a fact or an idea?—I do not care. Nothing shall ever make me look on Captain Brand as my husband. I will not

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quarrel with him, because I believe he can be very severe—a tyrant, in fact—if he chooses; but I am determined not to have any more private talks and explanations with him. I will be always cold and civil; if I keep to this, he will soon dislike me. It is troublesome to have to do it. It makes me feel unnatural; but for the marriage, I could not keep it up, but when I think of that it is easy enough.

I have laid down my pen during these reflections, and I really must write this letter. I leave off again to read what I have written. I have told papa all this story exactly as it happened, and I feel stricken dumb—hushed out of all my expressions of dislike. What agony it will cost papa to read the news I have told him! What a trifling, heartless girl I have been to be able to think of myself so much, to care even whether I am amused or dull, so soon after I lost *her;* and yet I feel as if I have never yet realized my grief, as if, when at last I find myself in a quiet home again, it will all come to me more really than it can come while I am so tossed about among strangers.

I have finished my letter, and I read it once again. I have not made my dislikes to Captain Brand strong enough, but it is very difficult to do this. I am obliged to tell how much *she* liked and trusted him, and, somehow, I cannot write the hard words I want when I think over all she said of Captain Brand. At last the door opens. I start up, but it is only the abbé.

"Ne vous dérangez pas." He holds up his hand, and passes on toward Eugène's study. I lean back in my chair, but I cannot hear voices. Suddenly, I hear the key turn in the lock, but the abbé does not reappear.

I sit waiting and waiting. I scribble over the blotting-paper till it is spoiled. The abbé went in to give Eugène his lesson, but how silently he gives it!

I have folded my letter and sealed it; I want something to do. There is so little to look at in this great, bare room; I never care much for reading, and I am sure that pianoforte is out of tune.

I look at the books with which the abbé has provided me—Shakespeare, so yellow inside that it is almost illegible, "Rasselas," and "The Vicar of Wakefield." These last two have gilt edges, and I abhor gilt edges; they only go with dull books or silly ones.

I have not looked out of these windows yet; they face the terrace, and—why, how did he get out?—there is the abbé going down the green slope with Captain Brand. He cannot have gone down by the turning staircase, that would have taken him to the back of the house; besides, I saw the comte lock the door and put the key in his pocket. If Eugène is not engaged with the abbé, he surely might come to me.

If I go out I may miss him, and I want to tell him about this dreadful journey. It is so nice to feel he is my friend—he is sure to take my part; he would not think me wrong, as Captain Brand does. No one ever thought me wrong before. I believe that man would like to lecture me all day long. I wish I dared open that study-door; but I am a great coward sometimes.

I smile at my next idea, but I act upon it. I may as well try whether the quaint old piano is in tune or not—the only in-door pursuit I like is singing; I could sing all day for the actual love I have for it.

I don't know many songs, but I love one which my mother never liked to hear me sing. She used to say that it suited my voice, but it did not suit my character. It is a kind of a wail all through, with "sad and weary, lone and dreary," coming at the end of each verse.

I feel it so much to-day; I am so lone and dreary, now she has gone from me, that, as I end the song, I burst into sobs and tears.

"Ah! what a dismal, wretched life to live alone for ever so long—for it is being quite alone not to be with a person one loves."

Some one has come into the room. I dry my eyes quickly, and I keep my head turned away. It is Eugène, and he comes up to me. I feel sure it is he, but I cannot turn round.

"Mademoiselle must not sing such sad songs—her song should be like the lark's, full of joy and upspringing brightness."

I forget my red eyes—I turn round pouting.

"I thought you were my friend, and you talk to me of brightness, when you might have guessed I had a reason for being dull."

He looks unhappy in an instant—I nearly laugh out from contradiction.

"I see that you are really in sorrow, my friend"—he is so kind and tender that I am comforted. "Won't you tell me about it, Gertrude?"

He drags one of those heavy chairs close

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to where I sit, and rests his elbow on the piano.

I am quite happy in remembering that those two are safe at the bottom of the hill.

"Have you not heard, then?" I look at him, and I suppose all my misery shows in my eyes—for he speaks sadly again.

"No, I heard nothing. I felt unwilling to follow your guardian this morning; he is, I think, a rude person; and, when I came in from riding, both he and the abbé were absent."

"Then you do not know that I am to take another long journey to find Madame La Peyre?"

He starts up and looks very angry.

"No, I have not heard this, and you shall not go. I ask you, Gertrude, how can this man take you away against your will?"

He looks at me so keenly, with such glowing eyes, that my eyes droop.

"It is not so much that I am taken away as that your abbé does not ask me to remain."

He looks delighted.

"Oh, if that is all, it can be arranged; my friend the abbé refuses me nothing."

I shake my head.

"Ah, but he will refuse you this, and"—I feel compelled to give some reason for Captain Brand's interference—"this person with whom I travel received a charge from my mother to place me with Madame La Peyre himself, so he feels anxious to see me with her. There is no help; I must go."

I look up again—his eyes are full of reproach.

"And you do not care to stay! It is true—this which I hear of you English, you are all cold alike. Only just now you promised to be my friend, and to stay here with me, and you are now resigned to leave me."

He turned away, and walked up and down the room. He looks so handsome and dignified. I am so unhappy to have displeased him.

I sit still, feeling as if my heart was growing big enough to choke me.

Why do I dread so much to leave him? I do not know. I only feel that, if he turns against me, my heart must burst, it aches so sorely. He looks so tall and manlike—he strides up and down with such long steps—I believe I am afraid of him.

But I cannot bear it. I cannot sit here and let Eugène be miserable, thinking I do not care for him, when I do care for him so much!

"Eugène"—I say it very timidly, and he stops in his walk—

"Eh bien—what is it?"

"It is you who are cold"—these hot tears start out and blind me; "can you not see that I am unhappy? and, instead of being sorry for me, you only scold and frighten me."

And then I hide my face, and my heart-ache breaks forth in convulsing sobs.

Eugène comes close to me directly—he takes my hands from my face, and holds them and kisses them, and then he puts his arm round me, and I cry comfortably on his shoulder. I feel very timid; but I am not afraid now, for he is not angry.

"My dear little one, my sweet Gertrude," he whispers, "come into the study, we shall be better there."

He goes to open the door—it is locked. He turns round and looks at me.

"This is extraordinary. I did not even know there was a key."

"The abbé went in there just now"—and then I stop and blush—I begin to see that the abbé has locked the door to separate me from his pupil.

Eugène comes back to me, but the charm is broken—I draw myself away when he comes so close.

"Let us go into the garden, you know I have still to see the other side of the river."

"As you please," and he looks vexed.

I followed him slowly down the great staircase. I feel fonder of him than ever, and yet I have grown shy again, and I wish he had not put his arm round me. I am not angry with him, but still I am troubled; I do not feel the same happy freedom I felt in the morning—and I begin to wonder what I should do to prevent him from again comforting me in this way.

I suppose in France friends are more affectionate than we English are, and yet how can I tell? I never had a boy friend before, and girl friends—I have seen them—walk about with arms round one another's waists; still, I hope Eugène won't do it again, it makes me so uncomfortable.

When we reach the top of the double flight of steps, we see Captain Brand and the abbé on the terrace.

Eugène muttered a strange-sounding word, and then, instead of going down the steps to

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the garden, he comes back and stands beside me in the door-way.

I look down into the two faces at the foot of the steps. I see the stern-set expression in Captain Brand's eyes, and I harden myself yet more against him. Oh! it is too cruel, in the midst of all my sorrow and loneliness, just when a little gleam of brightness has visited me, that he should grudge it me. The abbé's face is twitching and puckering in the most singular fashion.

Eugène gives them no time to speak. "Monsieur l'Abbé, it is not true, is it, that you have consented to allow this young lady to depart from Château Fontaine even before she has reposed herself?"

A deep, red flush comes on Captain Brand's face. I feel frightened, so I look away, and hold myself as erect as possible. The abbé smiles, and fondles his smooth chin with one hand.

"I have no choice, my son; mademoiselle is not confided to me, but to madame, my sister, and I may not interfere with her claims."

He raises his other hand—to show that the subject is dismissed—but Eugène runs down the steps, passes his arm through the abbé's, and drags him along under the trees.

CHAPTER XI.

THE ABBÉ ON GUARD.

So I was left alone with Captain Brand. I did not run away this time. I resolved to let him say what he chose.

But he only came quietly up the steps.

"This is a quaint old place, is it not?" He spoke quite calmly. "I think you will be happy here if you like Madame La Peyre."

"I am sure to like her. Now I want to know how I am to send my letter to my father?"

"You will have to wait till we reach Havre again, or even Southampton; these cross-country foreign posts are not safe;" and then he stood aside for me to pass into the house.

"No, thank you, I shall stay here a bit; I have been in-doors all the morning."

He has had the sense to go in and leave me alone; but, even if he had staid, I should have sent him to fetch something for me, and then I should have given him the slip. I shall see quite enough of Captain Brand before we get to Devonshire. Still I am softened; it was honest of him to be so careful about my letter, and, as he is so fond of lecturing, he might have said something disagreeable to me about this morning.

Here I blushed, and ran down the steps. Rosalie came out of the door as I left it; she had my hat in her hand.

She came panting down the steps after me. "Monsieur le Capitaine has sent me to bring the hat of mademoiselle. Ma foi, I have not till now seen a young lady who will run about in full air with a bare head; it is enough for un coup-de-soleil; and then it spoils the skin."

I took the hat from Rosalie very haughtily. How absurd! Captain Brand seems to think I am quite a child.

"I am just as well without a hat; after a sea-voyage, Rosalie, there is not any complexion left to spoil."

"Hein!" Rosalie put her head on one side, and looked at me as if I were a new species of female. "When mam'selle gets to England, she will find a change; my mother Angélique knows how to well bring up the young ladies—ma foi, mam'selle will see for herself."

"Your mother Angélique, what can she have to do with me? Do you know, Rosalie, that Madame La Peyre would not be pleased at the way in which you are talking to me?"

Rosalie nodded and nodded till her earrings danced in the sunshine, and her freckled face looked uglier than ever.

"Mademoiselle is wise, no doubt, but she does not know every thing." She looked spiteful, I thought. "My mother Angélique is the femme-de-chambre of Madame La Peyre; as well could this hand do without its fellow"—she clapped one of her brown palms into the other—"as our mistress without my mother; and mam'selle will find also that madame, our mistress, is just and good; she will not believe evil of those who have served her and hers for generations at the word of a stranger and a heretic."

Rosalie signed herself and turned up her eyes till I only saw the yellow whites of them. Already I had taken a strange dislike to this woman, now I felt inclined to smile; her rudeness was explained.

"But, Rosalie, how unjust you are; how

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can I help being a heretic? We do not choose our religion when we are born."

She put one hand over her light freckled brows, and peered at me from underneath suspiciously, with a slow, questioning look.

"Aha! we shall see. Mam'selle may be a heretic from ignorance now, but when she returns to Château Fontaine she will have seen la Mère Angélique; and then mam'selle knows, does she not, that an obstinate heretic is damnée body and soul, and must burn in everlasting torment."

She smiled while she said these horrible words—I could not bear it. I ran past her through the trees till I reached the river, and then crept along beside it till I came to the place where I had landed in the morning.

I looked round, but there was nothing living in sight; a plank was laid across the narrow stream, and I crossed and found an upward path that soon brought me to the grassed terraces and old statues I had seen from the other side. But the grass was ragged and overgrown—in some places worn away, and its place supplied by moss of a close, slimy growth, or by huge bare patches of white rock — the statues were green and broken with age and neglect; there were fountains, but they were dry and choked, and the spaces where flowers should have been were overrun with coarse-leaved weeds.

It was better at a distance. I suppose every thing is better at a distance, and then I thought of Eugène—no, he is not best at a distance—how delightful if I could meet him here! and then I blushed and felt shy again. I went on till the trees grew thicker and came near to the river. This was the wood I had seen from the other side.

It was very pleasant here. I did not know how fierce the sun's heat had been till I reached the cool, green shadow. I leaned against one of the tall, slender trees. A bright-eyed squirrel darted across from a bough above my head, looked down saucily at me for a minute, and then dropped an empty nutshell at my feet.

"Dear little fellow, he is free—he has no one to control him and watch him all day."

I wish Rosalie had not said that about her mother. I was beginning to look forward to seeing Madame La Peyre—but if I am to be preached at all day, and told I am a heretic, she will not be much improvement on Captain Brand; however, I shall get rid of him —that is a decided comfort.

I walked on to the wooden bridge. I longed to get into the boat—I saw it had been brought back again—but I had no skill in rowing, and I was afraid then. I tried to find my way back up through the hanging wood to the little garden behind the château, with the clipped yew-hedge, but in vain. The nut-wood was full of paths, all exactly alike. I tried first one and then another, but I always came back to the same point. I was so tired, at last, that I went back to the bridge, and sat down on it.

I must have spent a long time in this ramble, for the sun was actually out of sight; but then I was, of course, at the bottom of the valley he had to cross every day, and there were high trees on each bank.

I look toward the turn of the river, and I see some one moving there.

It may be Eugène. I am not tired now. I feel in a glow of happiness as I hurry along through the birch-wood and meet him. A little gate leads out of this on to the ruined terraces. I pass my squirrel just before I reach it. "Ah! my friend, I don't envy you now —I am as happy as you are."

I open the gate, and I see that it is not Eugène; it is the abbé coming down from the last terrace.

He smiles.

"Ah! my dear young lady, I have been seeking you these two hours—you must be so dull wandering about by yourself. My pupil has gone out riding."

He looked at me—but I was on my guard. I felt affronted with this sly old man about that locked door, and I was determined not to trust him more than he trusted me.

I was quite disappointed. I thought him so gentle and easy to manage.

"I am the more grieved to have lost so much of your society, as we are to have so little of it, less even than we expected."

I felt my eyes and cheeks flame with eagerness. What have these two meddling men been plotting? They are resolved to keep Eugène and me apart—they shall not. I will see him alone again before I leave Château Fontaine.

When I am very determined, I usually frown.

"I don't understand," I said to the abbé.

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He looked at me before he answered.

"For one thing I am glad"—he spake as soothingly as if I were a fractious child of six—"you will be a day sooner with my sister—you are to leave us to-morrow, mademoiselle."

"I cannot, I will not;" I spoke impetuously, and the abbé looked surprised—pained, I fancied; "I am much too tired to travel again so soon; Captain Brand is so rough and strong that he cannot, of course, judge of my fatigue."

The abbé looked more sweetly courteous than ever.

"I am grieved to hear that mademoiselle is so fatigued. I had no idea of it—on the contrary, I thought mademoiselle had been roaming about of her own free-will ever since I last saw her."

I looked sharply at him, but there was not a trace of sarcasm in his smile.

The old slyboots! "So I have, monsieur; but it is one thing to saunter about this charming place, to please one's self, and to take a long journey, without any stop in it, to please another person."

"But do you not know why Captain Brand is so anxious to proceed to England?"

The abbé looked at me with a wondering inquiry in his eye.

I did not answer. I could not say. He wants to take me away from Eugène; I know well enough that is his only reason. The abbé is obliged to go on:

"When a vessel is lost, it is necessary that the captain should report its loss personally with as little delay as possible. I believe that already the captain has come out of his way to bring you here; but he thought to find my sister, and to have gone back at once to Havre. I believe he is right, mademoiselle, to depart to-morrow, otherwise he may get into trouble; and I am sure you are too generous to wish him to incur rebuke unnecessarily."

I felt impatient with the abbé and his formal discourse. I longed to run away from him. I might as well have tried to escape from my own shadow; he suited his pace to mine—if I stopped, he at once found something to admire or inspect—and, finally, before I had decided on any plan of escaping, he had led me, without any seeming compulsion, back to the house, and stood aside to let me pass up the steps.

"As you say, mademoiselle, you are tired, and must want rest."

He spoke so sweetly that, even while I chafed against it, I was obliged to find his companionship pleasant.

He stopped when we came to the first turn in the gallery.

"I have a more comfortable resting-place here than you will find in the saloon—if you will honor me with a visit."

He opened a door, and led the way into the coziest little room I ever saw—it was square, with one deeply-recessed window in it; heavy, dark curtains were drawn nearly across this, so that there was not much light except from some smouldering logs in the tiled fireplace; but the abbé lit the wax-candles in the two silver sconces on each side of this, and the room looked bright and cheerful, as well as cozy. I saw that there was a rich Persian carpet, and that the chairs and sofas were covered with Eastern-looking stuffs.

"Will you sit down here, mademoiselle?"

It looked only an ordinary easy-chair; but, as soon as I was seated, the abbé pressed a spring, and I found myself lying full-length on a most comfortable sofa.

"Now, my dear child"—he spoke quite genially, not in the studied, courteous way that I had fancied natural of him—"rest, or go to sleep, or do as you please; I have to write, and shall not disturb you."

"Thank you; I will rest a little, and then I will go to my room."

I lay still, watching the sparks fly up like silent messengers—watching the abbé settle to his carved writing-desk in one corner—then my eyes strayed round, and I saw a recess with a curtain half drawn across it—here fixed against the wall was a beautiful silver crucifix—and I caught a vision of a prayer-desk and an image of the Madonna—also I thought I saw one of the leaves of a triptych—I began to think I should like to explore that nook.

What a dear, comfortable little room!—and I can make out in the uncertain light that there are pictures on the walls and statuettes on the mantel-shelf, and rows of quaint shelves, with odd-shaped red-and-brown vases and blue-and-white plates.

Yes, I will lie here a little longer, and then—

"Mademoiselle! Mamzelle Stua!"

Is it the abbé shrieking at me? My arm

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is shaken violently. I open my eyes and start up to find Rosalie's yellow eyebrows close to my face.

"Why, I have only just lain down here; what has happened?"

"Mamzelle!"—Rosalie shakes me again; what a spiteful creature she is! she must see I am awake—"the dinner is served; they are placing themselves at table—is mamzelle going to make Monsieur l'Abbé wait for her at dinner as well as at breakfast?"

I feel provoked.

"If they have gone in to dinner, they are not waiting for me; you can say I am coming."

And then, without looking at her, I ran up-stairs to my room.

My flushed face and half-closed eyes show me that I have been found asleep.

"Well, it shows how tired I am still; they may wait, I am not going down till I have set my hair straight."

CHAPTER XII.

CAPTAIN BRAND'S RESOLUTION.

I found a place set for me beside the abbé, and then I saw Eugène ever so far off on the other side of the table, with Captain Brand facing him. Something in all this vexed me. It seemed planned to keep us apart. We do not wish to be deceitful, and yet, if we are to speak to one another, we must do it by stealth. Well, I do not like deceit, but these two men are making us deceitful, without any fault of ours. The dinner is long and dull.

I make no effort to speak to Eugène during dinner, and I observe that he scarcely looks toward me. The abbé is more charming than ever, so I rouse myself and answer him.

"I am so pleased that you like my hermitage," he says; "you can occupy it in my absence when you return to Château Fontaine. It is a capital nook to study in, and also, it seems, it is good for sleep," he adds, with a sly smile.

I feel ashamed.

"But shall you not be here when Madame La Peyre returns?"

"That is like all the rest of life, my charming young friend—quite undecided."

"I don't agree with you about life"—I feel cross as I say this—"I think, if one has a firm will and perseverance, one may make one's own life, and make circumstances yield."

The abbé's eyebrows go up, and the corners of his mouth droop with the peculiar look I before noticed. I study his face very much, because instinct tells me that he does not show himself to outsiders that which he really is. At the same time, I am conscious that Captain Brand is studying my face just as keenly as I study the abbé's.

"That is a remarkable opinion for a woman, and especially for a young lady. Depend on it, my dear child, we are safer and happier on the road chosen for us by others than in striking out new paths for ourselves."

There is a touch of earnestness—of entreaty even—in the abbé's voice that startles me. A suspicion comes like lightning. I look quickly at Captain Brand, and I see him glance at the abbé.

I understand every thing now—the locking of the study-door, and the way in which the abbé has monopolized me for the afternoon. Captain Brand has told him the story of the marriage!

I do not think I was ever so angry. Till now I looked upon it as a dead secret, known only to three persons, and it had never occurred to me that Captain Brand would tell any one of his own base conduct.

I stop talking and laughing with the abbé. I say, stiffly, "I have a headache, monsieur, and I will go up-stairs."

"We will all go." The abbé rose so nimbly that I have not a chance of escape. "Mademoiselle shall have some coffee, which will cure her headache, and then she will have the goodness to sing me a song."

We were near the door as he spoke. I saw Captain Brand's face beam with sudden pleasure; but I cared too little to find out the cause of his changed expression.

Up-stairs the room felt cold, and I grew calmer.

As soon as we had had coffee, the abbé asked his pupil to open the piano.

Eugène opened it, and then he stood looking at an old engraving which hung near.

It seemed as if he were waiting for me. Captain Brand had just asked the abbé a question about our journey, so I felt free from his watchfulness.

I got up quickly and went to the piano,

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but Eugène moved away as soon as I reached it. Then I saw why he had stood so still—a little three-cornered note lay on the key-board.

How easily slyness comes! I always detested concealment or secrets, and yet I took the note up as quickly as if I was a practised deceiver, and leaned over the piano while I slipped it into the pocket of my dress.

My voice fluttered as I began to sing, but Eugène came up to the piano again, and I seemed to be singing only to him, and not to the others. At first this made me timid, but the song was an "Adieu," and, by the time I reached the end, my eyes had grown misty and my voice choked.

I gave a timid glance up at Eugène, but I could not understand his face, and yet I had heard a sigh while I sang.

Then I felt that some one was moving away from the back of my chair.

I turned slightly round, and saw Captain Brand move away into the darkest corner of the room.

"Thank you a hundred times, mademoiselle, you have given me real pleasure." The abbé said this charmingly, but then he was always suave.

I think Captain Brand might have said something. Why did he come to listen, and then go away? If he had only kept behind me to watch Eugène, he would have staid, because Eugène is still beside me.

But I only thought this for an instant, and then I forgot every thing but the note in my pocket.

I was longing to read it. The abbé asked for another song, and I sang a little, lively, Spanish air. I had picked it up from listening to a sailor on board the Adelaide. The abbé was delighted; Captain Brand said, "Thank you," but he did not stand behind me listening, this time.

The evening dragged wearily. The abbé took me round the room, and showed me quaint treasures, collected by Monsieur La Peyre and his predecessors. I did not care much to look at them, and I suppose the abbé found this out.

"You are tired," he said at last, "and you have a long journey before you. I think, mademoiselle, you will be glad to say 'Good-night.'"

I said, "Good-night" to Captain Brand, and I was just going to hold my hand out to Eugène, but he made me a low, formal bow.

I know that Captain Brand is looking at us, and I feel guilty; but why should Eugène hide his friendship? I have no wish to hide mine.

But the abbé has reached the door, and is holding it open. I think he gives me his blessing as he hands me into the charge of Rosalie.

"Ah! mam'zelle, you are ready for bed." There is always a hard, satirical ring in the voice of this clumsy, ugly woman, that jars upon me. "Mam'zelle is sleepy, and no wonder—if young ladies will run about all day long in the sunshine, like dogs and cats, they cannot expect to keep awake."

I am too tired to argue. I wonder why this woman dislikes me so much. I feel almost afraid of her—not of any thing she can do to harm me, but of the malicious looks I get from her dull, yellow-fringed eyes.

"Good-night." We had reached my bedroom door, and I hold out my hand for the lamp she carries.

"Tiens; mam'zelle is in too much haste to-night." She comes in and lights the lamp on my table, and then she dawdles about the room, pretending to arrange the bed and dressing-table, where there is no need of arrangement.

I gape ostentatiously, but she takes no notice; she behaves just as if she knows I have that note in my pocket, and that I am dying to read it.

She goes at last, but puts her head in, a few moments after, to ask at what time I will be called; then I hear her heavy footsteps outside for some time, as she finally goes away, and I have no means of fastening the door.

I scarcely know why I shrink from Rosalie's observation. Why should I hesitate to read the note before her? I care little enough for the opinion of my inferiors—but now for my note.

Such a few words in it! Written in a neat, formal hand:

"When you quit your bedroom to-morrow, come straight down-stairs, and, when you reach the door by which you enter the gallery, pass it by, and go on descending the turning staircase till you reach the foot of it—it will be very dark, but the door at the bottom is unfastened; you will find me outside that door."

This was all; there was neither beginning nor end.

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I read it over and over again. I think of it all the time I say my prayers, and I put it under my pillow when I at last get into bed.

CHAPTER XIII.

A FAREWELL.

I woke early, and jumped out of bed, and then I remembered that Eugène had not specified any time for meeting me. Captain Brand had said we were to leave Château Fontaine very early. So it would be best to go down the winding staircase as soon as I was ready; but then Rosalie might come with my coffee, and she would seek for me, and our meeting would be interrupted. I feel that Rosalie means mischief. I do not think one ever takes so strong a dislike for nothing, and it is not ordinary dislike that I feel toward this woman; it is a shrinking antipathy.

When I am dressed, I open the windows and look out; the sun shines brightly, but my window only looks down on a little dingy square court, with buildings on all four sides, and a pump, with a greenish stone trough, in the centre; but, though I can only see a blue sky, so blue that there is nothing suggestive in it, I can hear the birds chirping and twittering to one another in a very pleasant fashion, unlike any thing I ever heard on the other side of the world. The sound led my thoughts away from Eugène, and a longing came to me for something which I had never known — a home, such a home as I had dreamed of, full of sunshine, and mirth, and love, without the petty formalities which in our house made us a collection of persons like the books on the library-shelves—separately closed, with no power of getting together.

My father I saw every morning at our silent breakfast while he read his letters.

I spent all my evenings in the school-room, I had never really seen much of my mother till we came on board the Adelaide. I believe her day was given up to my two sisters, and to the duties of society. She came into the school-room every morning and kissed me, and I lunched with her. My governess was so anxious for my progress that she never allowed talk on any subject but education; besides, she was always reading to herself.

The birds seem to have happy homes in their nests.

But the birds leave their nests as soon as they are full-grown, so the time is past for the home-life I have been longing for, and then I remember that every bird makes itself a nest of its own.

Ah! but it is quite different; and it only shows that one cannot make comparisons between animal and human life. Every bird mates, and I suppose quite half of men and women never marry, and, unless one has a home like a nest, I would rather not marry.

At last I hear Rosalie coming. For once I am glad to see her; marriage, and all thoughts belonging to it, make me feel weary of life. I should like a home with friends in it, but no husband or marriage for me.

"Tiens, mam'zelle" — Rosalie sets the tray on the table, and pulls off the tucked-up ends of the cloth with triumph — "but see how good is Monsieur l'Abbé—here is a wing of chicken and some eggs, and a brioche and coffee and some abricots, because mam'zelle makes her journey at the hour when reasonable folks take their breakfast."

"Yes, he is very good; you can thank Monsieur l'Abbé for me—it is possible I shall not see him before I go."

"Yes, it is possible; it is now seven, and the cart is to come at half-past eight for the luggage of mam'zelle."

She stands by me, waiting to see me begin, so I eat as fast as I can in the hope she will go. But she lingers so long that I lose patience and begin to eat slowly.

"You need not stay, Rosalie," I say; "you must have plenty to do, and I shall eat much better if I am left alone."

Rosalie looks at me with her sly eyes, and then she laughs and goes away. I am half glad to leave Château Fontaine because of that woman; she is something between an idiot and a witch—a sort of yellow-haired female Caliban. I believe she is much younger than I fancied her. I only hope her mother is not like her. But I must hurry now. I pack all my things, and then I put on my hat and open my door very quietly.

In a moment or two I am safely past the door leading on to the gallery, and then I go on down the corkscrew stairs. Down, down, down. Eugène may well call it dark—it feels like a well or a dungeon, and full of cobwebs which come filming into my eyes and mouth,

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and turn me sick with horror. Oh, how I abhor darkness, it is so like falsehood and deceit! This thought makes me stand still so suddenly, that I cling to the rope, and quite forget how dirty it looked up above in the light. Deceit! What am I doing this morning? Why did I creep by Captain Brand's door so quietly if I am not deceitful? But no, nonsense, it is all his fault; he has put me into a false position, and he is answerable for all that happens. I must go on now, Eugène is waiting. I hurry on, and come to the end of the staircase with a suddenness that nearly upsets me. I grope for the fastening of the door, and I feel the latch move under my fingers. Eugène is pushing it open from the other side.

I just see that he looks more handsome than ever in the bright sunshine, and then his eyes sparkle so at sight of me, that I feel all at once ashamed and shy. If the door had not closed again behind me, I believe I should run away.

"Dear Gertrude, this is very kind." He holds my hand tightly in his, and draws me away from the door. I cannot remember what the place was like that we stood in; I only know that it was not the pig-and-chicken yard of yesterday. All I see is Eugène, and behind him is an old stone-wall, and a great plot of yellow marigolds grows at our feet.

"Then you know I am going?" I look up at Eugène; his face is so full of love for me that I feel I cannot go away from him. Tears come up into my eyes, and then I do not know how, but both my hands are in Eugène's, and he is calling me his "bien-aimée."

"Shall I never see you again?" My lips quiver so that I stop—I shall sob outright if I try to speak.

"Never see me? Gertrude, is it possible that you do not understand my love; you are my idol, I adore you, I worship you!" He kisses my hands so hard that I try to pull them away, but he is gentle in an instant. "Do not be alarmed, my well-beloved, it is all new to you, and if it had not been for this cruel parting I would have been more discreet, more patient, but how can I let you depart, my angel, without telling you my love—without asking for yours in return? You do love me, do you not?"

"I—I—you are my friend." I am getting so red that my eyes feel the glow on my cheeks. "I will always be your friend." I get this out bravely, and look up once more at Eugène.

He bends down and whispers, "You will be my friend now, but some day you will be more than that," and then his arm comes round me, and my face is on his shoulder. For the moment I am glad to hide it.

"Oh!" I whisper softly, "let me be always your friend."

"Say that you love me, and you shall be what you please." His lips are so close that the words are breathed into me rather than spoken. I am so happy; I should like to die just now, never to know an awakening from the strange, wild delight I feel.

"You will write to me, my beautiful Gertrude?"

"How can I write? The abbé will see my letters," I whisper.

"No; listen, Gertrude. I will write first. I know this village where Madame La Peyre lives. The abbé has seen it, and he has described it to me. There is a post-office, and you will inquire there for letters, and in every letter I will tell you where to write to me."

I look up full of admiring wonder; he seems such a strong power for my lonely helplessness. I can hardly believe I have such a friend, and he is all mine, too; at least I think he is.

"But you will forget me," I say, timidly, for indeed, when I look up and see him so bright, so beautiful and noble, a painful sense of unworthiness comes to me; I feel quite another girl from the Gertrude who thinks herself too good for Captain Brand.

"Do you think I can forget you?" He draws me closer, so close that I raise my head in remonstrance; and somehow Eugène kisses my lips. I free myself at once, I am angry, but I tremble from head to foot.

"You must not, indeed you must not; friends can be quite as dear without that."

He takes my hand so very gently and tenderly.

"My dear little one, when dear friends part, they must be allowed to say a tender farewell. You are not afraid I shall forget you now; we belong to each other; you believe me, my sweet friend."

His words send a shudder through me. I do not look on Captain Brand as my husband, but I have sense enough to know that for

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"GOOD-BY."

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the present there is a bar between me and Eugène. I will tell him every thing, and he shall decide.

My hand has staid in his passively, but now I hold it tightly, and look up in his face for the help I need in my confession.

Ah! I need never doubt his love; his eyes are telling me that, telling it with such a glow of confident happiness, that my doubts are quite melted by the warmth that seems to fill my veins; doubt is so chill of itself, it cannot linger now.

"Eugène, I do believe, and I will always love you." He takes both my hands in his again, and looks at me so intently, that I cannot keep my eyes on his; and I am sorry, for I so love his eyes. "But I want to tell you something."

He starts. "Not now, my well-beloved;" he takes one hand away, but holds both mine with the other, and I feel that he is looking away.

A gate opens and swings-to (even now if I hear the sharp slam of a gate, my heart turns sick at the sound); then heavy, powerful steps, how well I know them, come close to where we are standing. I try to be myself again, and look boldly up at Captain Brand, and claim my right to this leave-taking with Eugène. I am not a slave.

I wonder why Eugène seems to care so much. He stands quite silent.

"Miss Stewart, I have been looking for you," Captain Brand's voice sounds, oh! so hard and severe; "we are to start very soon. Will you come and see about your luggage with me?"

My spirit forces itself through my confusion. Captain Brand is very strangely pale.

"You know I have no luggage, only the bag I brought from Havre, it is quite ready in my room."

I draw a little nearer to Eugène. I feel that this is perhaps our last moment together. I will not be carried off from him without saying "Good-by."

Captain Brand is surely bewitched. I had counted on making him angry, and then I knew I could manage him, but his voice is just as stiff and measured when he speaks again:

"Very well; then you had better say good-by to Monsieur de Vaucresson at once, and we will go together to make our adieux to the abbé, and thank him for his kind hospitality."

I feel a warning pressure in Eugène's hand, but I am resolved that Captain Brand shall not see me say good-by, so I turn my back upon him.

We have said good-by, and I am following the man whom I hate more than ever along a rough path through gates I do not know, till we emerge beside the terrace before the house.

How dreadful it is to say good-by, and to feel some one stands by who has no sympathy with either one's love or one's sorrow! Good-by — it is so quickly said, but till it is said the meaning does not touch one's heart; it feels to me like a dream that I am parted from Eugène. I have not said one of the words I had planned to say. I wanted to ask so many questions, to tell him he is the first friend I had ever had—the only one I mean to trust in, so that I cling to him as I never clung to any one before. I am wrenched away, with all these new-springing feelings created for no purpose, for they cannot be shared with him. I long to get relief in a burst of tears, but my heart is hard and heavy, there is a dull weight on every thing which checks the keen sorrow that pierces me. A cry goes up from me as the weight grows heavier.

"I cannot bear it — I cannot! What have I done to have all this grief laid on me, and such a hopeless load beyond, for I feel so subjected by the strong will which is, as it were, leading me away a captive, that in this despair I am hopeless of freedom."

The *charrette*, a very rude chaise-cart, is below the steps. My walnut-faced friend the *concierge* stands at the horses' heads smiling, as if departure were a festival.

The abbé comes out of the house as we draw near; he must have been watching for us, but I scarcely notice him; behind him, hiding behind one flap of the double doors, is the grinning face of Rosalie, grinning, and yet with such a fixed spite in her eyes that surely some fiend has picked up a satyr's mask, and is watching our starting through its eye-holes.

Ah! it is Rosalie who has done it; she spied on me, and then sent Captain Brand to disturb my parting with Eugène. But I do not feel angry, I seem lost in utter dull stu-

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por; and now we have shaken hands with the abbé, and on our way to Havre.

Yes, I have left Château Fontaine; when shall I see it again?

I leave off here. I think I have left my childish days on the threshold of that door beside the plot of marigolds—till to-day I have lived for myself—now I am only a part of the life of Eugène de Vaucresson.

CHAPTER XIV.

MERDON.

I BELIEVE in first impressions. Now that I see the words written down, I fancy I have small reason, personally, for this belief; but the first aspect of Merdon, in all the golden glory of an August afternoon, softened at a glance the dislike I had conceived against it as a place of residence.

I had seen very little of Captain Brand on our journey. We crossed at night from Havre to Southampton, and then traveled on with scarcely any pause all the long, tedious way into Devonshire.

I believe the country between Exeter and Merdon is very beautiful, but I was too unhappy and too tired to care about it. I leaned back with closed eyes, neither asleep nor awake. The continual talk of two old gentlemen about politics kept me awake, although I could not get interested in what they said; and when they changed the subject, and I hoped for something more interesting, they only talked of best kind of oil-cake for feeding bullocks.

The abbé had written to his sister, and had inclosed the letter which my mother had consigned to the care of Captain Brand, so Madame La Peyre would have had some warning of my arrival.

"Here is Merdon station," says Captain Brand.

I am so unwilling to rouse myself, I unclose my eyes. The two old gentlemen go on with their talk, so they are not Merdon people. Captain Brand folds his newspaper very neatly, collects our bags and wraps, and then hands me out.

He makes some inquiry, and then he turns to me.

"There is no fly, and the house is quite near, so perhaps you will not mind walking. Are you very tired?"

There is that tender sound in his voice which always irritates me. I will not look up.

"Not very," and I look at the white gate behind the station to show him I am ready.

I follow Captain Brand up the steep road from the station in a sleepy, stupefied way; but, when we come to the end of it, I stop and look about me.

The road opens upon a sudden space shaded by elm-trees. These stand in groups of three and four apart from one another, and leave plenty of space for sunlight on large trunks of prostrate trees below—timber so gray that it looks as if it had lain there stripped of its bark ever since some of the whitewashed stone cottages round it were first built. In the centre of the space is an old iron pump, with a gray-stone trough in front; but it looks dry and unused.

The granite church stands on ground a little above the rest. A flight of steps near the pump leads up into the low-walled churchyard. At first it seems as if there were about six houses in Merdon; the thought comes to me that it is a charming picture, but a lifeless one. It reminds me of a toy of trees and cottages we used to play with—cottages in and out among the trees, as if they were having a game of hide-and-seek. As I look farther I see that this game of hide-and-seek is a feature of the village; cottages peep out nestled behind the tree-trunks; then, down a sudden turn, between two cottages, we come upon three or four set at right angles, with apple-trees in a tiny garden, the branches borne down with a weight of russet fruit.

When we reach the pump we see that the ground slopes down abruptly to another group of elms, which, although rooted at a so much lower level, tower up as high as those which stand on the rise above. In this valley is a little stream, where the Merdon ducks are splashing and fighting, and some girls are dipping quaint red pitchers to get water. Captain Brand stands still when we reach the edge of the steep descent. A girl in a red petticoat and white bonnet, with huge flaps hanging from it, turns round when she has filled her huge pitcher, and climbs up the bank.

Captain Brand goes forward to speak to her, but I stand still; I like to look at the sweet, peaceful scene. Above the cottage-roofs in the hollow I get a vision of sloping

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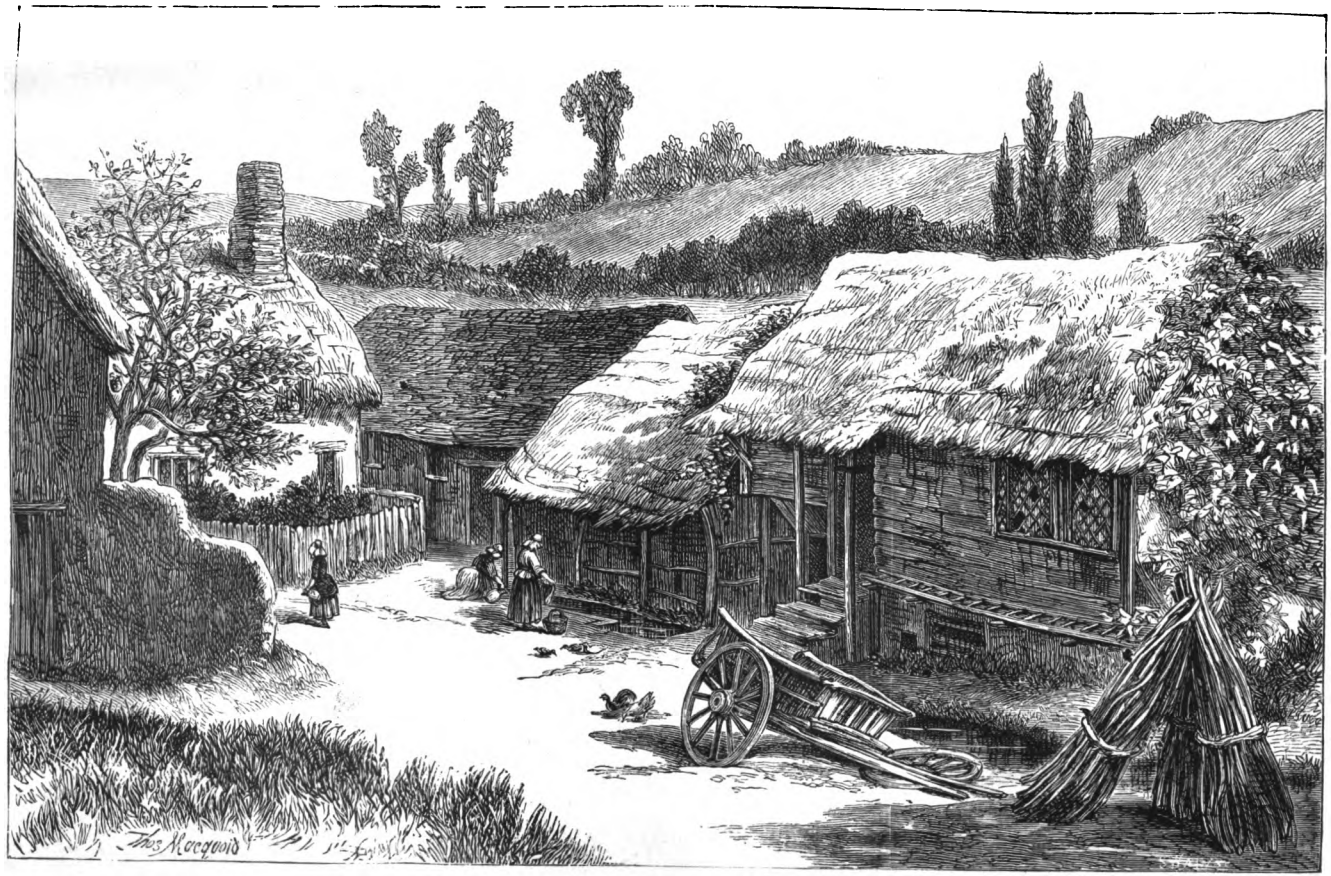

A DEVONSHIRE VILLAGE.

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green hills and dark woods; at my feet struts a hen with her brood; they are only three small ducks, and, as she clucks with all the importance of a fussy dowager, the ducks waddle in her wake; but every now and then instinct gets the better of duty, and they slip into the little stream and swim there merrily.

But the trees delight me; they are so grand, so stately, and they give such massive shadow; I never saw such trees before. The sun, even at the hottest, could not filter through the closely-leaved boughs and twigs that cross and recross overhead.

But Captain Brand has finished his questioning.

"Madame La Peyre's house is this way."

He looks over his shoulder at me, and begins to descend the bank to the stream.

A wild thought comes and rouses me. Now, here is an opportunity; if I run away in this strange place, where no one knows me, I may hide till Captain Brand has gone away. I know he must be in London to-morrow. I look round, and then a quite common vulgar obstacle fetters me—I have scarcely any money. Captain Brand told me on board the Eclair that he had some property my mother had given him to take care of for me. He was too wise, doubtless, to trust me with it till I am safe with Madame La Peyre. Well, we shall see. I suppose madame cannot tie me by the leg. After all, I should not have had time to get away; Captain Brand has already come to a halt, and is waiting for me.

"Madame La Peyre lives down there," he says, still over his shoulder, and he goes down the steep path toward the stream.

We pass a half-ruined wooden cottage, with a plank bridge over the water. We go alongside of the clear stream, so clear that the many-colored stones shine like jewels in its bed, and then we come to a little wooden bridge, with a thicket of tall purple flowers on each side of it. I love flowers, and I long to gather some of these, they look so feathery, crowning their tall spikes of narrow green leaves, but the captain goes on so fast that I am obliged to follow. Across a field—for it looks like a field made into a kitchen-garden, with potatoes on one side, starred with exquisite white and purple flowers, and a tall hedge of scarlet beans on the other hand. The path is stony, but I do not heed this. On every side hill rises over hill in varied shape and color, some bright-green slopes, checkered with golden squares ready for reaping; then, cutting across these, another hill rises abruptly, and turns a long shoulder of moor on its neighbor. I had never seen color like this before; rich purple, which I guessed to be heather, mingled with orange and a velvet-like brown, and in the midst huge masses of a cold gray granite, so fantastic in shape, and with such an abundance of scattered fragments, that it seemed as if giants had been playing ninepins, and had been petrified in the midst of their game.

There is something weird in the contrast of the smiling green and golden slopes with the barren moor and its rugged tenants. But a group of ash-trees stands before us, and shuts out any distant view.

Captain Brand holds open a gate, and we go on under the shade of the ash-trees, which rise from hedges on each side of the road. I have never seen hedges like these; they seem to be built up of fragments of granite topped with hazel and hawthorn bushes, but so thick a growth of ferns and mosses clusters out between these fragments of stone that their presence is only revealed by an occasional gray morsel peeping out between the delicate fronds of black maiden-hair, as if to see the world. I gather the ferns greedily; many of them are new to me. I have just made a lovely nosegay with rosy flowers in the midst, when Captain Brand turns down a descent between low stone-walls, which open suddenly on our right, so sharply and suddenly that I wonder how horses can go down it, yet the road is full of cart-ruts. The stone-wall on the right is ivy-grown, but over it I get a glimpse of farm-buildings; a little farther on we come to a stile in it, made of two huge granite blocks, set one rather above the other. Captain Brand vaults over this like a boy, and then holds out his hand to help me; but I don't care to be helped. He looks rather surprised when I jump from the topmost stone. I dare say he thinks me a hoiden, but his opinion is of no consequence to me.

We find ourselves in a grassed orchard, with a narrow path leading down to a gate. I never saw such an up-and-down country; there does not appear to be any level ground.

Captain Brand goes forward and opens the gate, and then he stands still, with a puzzled look on his face. I fancy he is very neat and particular, and I almost laugh at his dismay.

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If this is the entrance, it is very unlike all I have heard of English habits. A large square yard littered with dirty straw; in the midst a huge stone-trough, at which some black pigs are feeding; how different to the pigs of Château Fontaine! — these are round and plump and short-legged, just like grown-up sucking-pigs. Facing us, on the opposite side of the yard, is the farm-house, but seemingly the back view of it, for only one window appears, and a quaint, projecting stone porch, with a gable and square moulding below. We stand hesitating. Presently a figure moves in the shadow within the porch, and then the low wicket in front of it is drawn inward, and a tall woman comes a few steps forward. Very tall, very thin, with a reddish skin and dark eyes, she has thin, pinched lips, and a high, narrow forehead, as unlike as possible, and yet I knew by instinct, as well as by the jacket and skirt and cap, that this is not Madame La Peyre, but Rosalie's mother, la mère Angélique.

She stands waiting our approach with a stately courtesy, a half smile on her straight lips, but no welcome in her eyes, and yet, as I looked directly into them, I see good, expressive eyes, which could show love if la mère Angélique would let them. I have none of the antipathy toward her which I expected, only fear. I shrink nervously from the severe scrutiny of those piercing dark eyes.

The old woman courtesies, first to me and then to Captain Brand.

"Servante, mamzelle et m'sieur. Madame waits in the salon."

Captain Brand bends his tall head and passes under the arched porch. I noticed that its floor, and even that of the room into which it led through a wide passage, are paved with hard, stone-like substances.

The room into which she brings us looks like a kitchen; it is all of black, shining wood. From the open, heavy-beamed ceiling hang hams, huge pieces of bacon, and fagots of herbs. A fire burns on the open hearth, just as I had seen it at Château Fontaine, only here a hook hangs down from the chimney, and holds a huge pot boiling over the blaze; two wooden seats are fixed on each side, and the wall is built out so as to leave two comfortable screened seats actually in the fireplace.

An old, helpless-looking man sits on one of these seats, with a small round table before him; opposite is a scarlet curtain, and in front of this a little golden-haired child of a year old is swinging in a tiny chair suspended from one of the beams. It is so blue-eyed, so like a lovely cherub, that I forget all my fear, and the pending introduction to Madame La Peyre.

I slipped away from Angélique, and kissed and hugged the little darling.

"It is a pretty child, is it not, Gertrude?"

I bit my lip with vexation. Captain Brand had come back to where I stood, and I always repressed any show of feeling before him.

"Yes," I said, indifferently. We passed through a very small door, and stepped down a stone step into Madame La Peyre's *salon* — not a pretty room in itself; the floor seemed to have sunk; the windows were, I think, unnaturally near the low ceiling—such queer windows, wide and low, and divided into small compartments, filled with diamond-shaped panes. There was a certain brightness about the arrangements—vases of flowers on the table and on the low bookcases round the walls. The seat below the window was cushioned with bright Eastern-looking stuff, and from this rose up an old lady, for whom I felt a liking at once.

She was dressed in black silk, and she wore on her head a tasteful cap of some delicate lace, with just a little soft-colored pink ribbon.

She came forward, made a deep courtesy to Captain Brand, and then she put her arms round me and kissed me on both cheeks. Her skin felt as soft as velvet. She looked the impersonation of daintiness. Her hair was gray, almost white, but it had been very dark; her eyebrows were still black, and her eyes were dark and shining. I do not think she had been a beauty, but there was a liquid light in her eyes which was irresistible. No squareness of brow, nothing to give hardness, but such a mixture of sweetness, with arch vivacity, in those deep-set eyes and in the mobile, smiling mouth—such a grace in her small, slender figure, even in the movements of her delicate little hands, that I was at once captivated. I begin to see that every thing French has a strange fascination for me—a softness, a something, so opposed to the square ponderousness of the English—or is it because I find in any French person a link to Eugène? Rosalie is

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French certainly, but I forget her; but there must be exceptions to every thing.

"She is so like her mother." Madame keeps her arm round my waist and looks at Captain Brand, and then, before we are seated, Angélique appears at a door opposite to that by which we have come in.

"Madame will be served directly," she says, in her grave, earnest voice. "Mamzelle will have the goodness to follow me."

Rosalie over again, but I follow her; only, as I climb up the broad, uneven staircase, I resolve that Angélique shall not treat me as if I were a child.

We land at the end of such a long gallery that I see the house is much larger than I had fancied.

"Entrez, mamzelle."

Angélique opened the door of a large room, with a high, coved ceiling, whitewashed now, but with carved ornaments on the ceiling and mantel-shelf, which tell of an old date.

"This is madame's room," she explains; "mamzelle sleeps beside her." She crosses the next room, too large to sleep in, I think, and opens a door on the farther side of a great canopied bed.

"Voilà for mamzelle."

A pretty cozy little room, but I see no other entrance. I am to be cooped up, am I, like a chicken?

I stoop down to look out of the window, which is sunk and deeply recessed, and I see a sight which puts Angélique and Madame La Peyre out of remembrance.

My window looks out on open country, hill rises behind hill, and a chain of strangely-shaped, abrupt peaks ends my view; the last of these is higher, and has a wider summit than the rest, and over it hangs a sort of mist, which makes me feel sad and full of foreboding. I have no time to look at the lovely foreground of this scene, for Angélique rouses me.

"Mamzelle can look out to-morrow, the day after—when she will; but now she must arrange herself for dinner."

CHAPTER XV.

NEXT MORNING.

It is not bright sunshine as it was yesterday. I look out of my bedroom-window and I see a gray veil of driving rain between me and those far-off hills, but still I can make out that they are there, and also I see my friend the melancholy far-stretching heights. Madame La Peyre told me last night it is called Dartmoor. I wish it were not so far off; it seems to draw me to it with a strange fascination, and yet I usually shrink from sadness.

Is a fresh grief to come to me in Merdon?

I go down-stairs and find madame at the breakfast-table. She has not any pink ribbons in her cap, it is muslin edged with lace.

She kisses me so tenderly.

"I hope you have slept well, my child. You see," she points to the breakfast-table, "I conform to English habits. I lived so many years in England in my youth that I have never given up some of its fashions."

And then I blush, for I feel that in one quick, rapid glance, Madame La Peyre has taken a survey of my face and my dress.

I look round with a feeling of relief.

When I said a hurried good-by to Captain Brand last night, I had a dread that he would reappear. I am so glad he has gone without lecturing me, as I expected he would, about my conduct at Château Fontaine.

I do not know whether it is right or wrong, but, when I am not scolded for any thing I feel guilty about, I lose any misgiving I may have had, and feel quite justified in conduct. I suppose I have not any real conscience.

Last night I told Madame La Peyre all about my home in Tasmania. She would not let me speak of my journey. She said, with her sweet, bright smile, that I must never take sad thoughts to bed with me.

"You have slept well, my sweet child," she says, this morning; "your eyes tell me so. I shall have to freshen myself up, Gertrude, to keep pace with your young spirits!"

And then she gives me as mischievous a glance from beneath her eyelashes as if she were seventeen.

"My dear," she says, confidentially, when Angélique has taken away the breakfast, "that is a very young guardian for you; very young, and very good-looking."

She gives me a quick little look, while she arranges some flowers in a vase.

"Young! why Captain Brand is quite

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middle-aged." I was going to say old, but a look at madame's gray hair checked me; "and I think him plain."

Madame La Peyre laughs softly to herself. I fancy she has a way of doing this; it makes me a little shy of her. I hope she is not satirical.

"Captain Brand is thirty at the most," she says, quietly, "and he is a very fine man, with a good and noble countenance."

"I have not looked at him much," and then I feel my face flush, and Madame La Peyre is looking at me curiously; but I am sure she does not know any thing about the marriage. I hope Captain Brand will not tell her when he comes back; he is coming to see me before he sails again. I must take care not to leave him alone with Madame La Peyre, and then he cannot—or I will tell him I wish it kept secret.

Madame goes away to her invalid, and comes back with some embroidery, such delicate beautiful work; how skillful she is at it!

"We have only nine rooms in this farm-house, Gertrude, so you must be content when you are indoors to sit in your bedroom. You shall go and see Mrs. Dayrell, but I do not think it good for you to be much with so very ill a person. Now, I want to hear how you like Château Fontaine."

"It is delightful. I can't tell you how fond I am of the abbé. I like every thing in it except Rosalie."

Madame La Peyre laughed.

"Rosalie is the most harmless creature possible; the poor child was born at Château Fontaine, and she is privileged because she has not quite the same wits as others. Do not let Angélique know that you dislike Rosalie, she is her only and well-beloved child."

I did not answer. It seemed to me that Madame La Peyre studied her servants too much, and Rosalie was more than ever repulsive to me now that I knew she was half-witted.

"And my brother's pupil, was he not at Château Fontaine?"

"Yes."

Madame La Peyre looked up from her needle-work, but I dared not meet her eyes. A sudden rush of warm color swept upward to my very temples.

I could not sit there beside her quick, observant eyes. I jumped up and knelt on the cushioned seat so that I could look out of the window. I could not see the hills from it; I only saw a small garden stuffed so full of flowers and box that it looked choked. It was hedged by a thick wall of holly.

"Well"—Madame La Peyre had waited a little—"and how do you like Monsieur de Vaucresson?"

The question was confusing, but there was something that at once put me at ease with Madame La Peyre. I had not seen many people, but still at luncheon at home I had often seen mothers with their daughters and middle-aged ladies, and it occurred to me that these ladies had never talked to me about gentlemen. I felt Madame La Peyre's question to be more in consonance with my own age than with hers.

"I like him very much," but I still looked out of the window.

"He is a great favorite of mine," she said. "He is so handsome, and he knows so well how to behave to women, and young men of his age do not always know this, Gertrude. I am sure he was very courteous to you, was he not?"

"Oh, yes."

"Ah! but for the Revolution, he would have a fine property; but, though there are fine estates, the family will never recover all that once belonged to them. It is a sad position to be of the *haute noblesse*, and to have small means."

"Is Monsieur de Vaucresson the head of his family?"

"Yes, he is, but his mother rules, and will rule every thing till he is five-and-twenty. She is a clever woman, but so haughty and determined. I think, Gertrude, women should be gentle, and sweet, and yielding; they should never choose for themselves."

I do not know what possessed me; I think it was that the warmth and brightness of her manner drew me on to confidence, spite of myself.

"May they not choose their husbands?" I said it saucily, but I felt my cheeks glow, and mine is such a colorless face that blushing betrays me more than if I had rosy cheeks.

Madame La Peyre let her embroidery fall in her lap, and looked at me in gentle wonder. "My child, you are not serious; it is not possible that my excellent friend has brought her daughters up with false ideas.

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In the lower class of life women may choose for themselves, but even then the affair is usually arranged by their parents; but for you it would be impossible."

I looked at her.

"Do you mean, madame, that it is better not to choose for one's self? did you not choose Monsieur La Peyre?" I spoke stubbornly. I felt in worse bondage than ever. She raised her eyebrows with a little gentle surprise.

"I never saw Monsieur La Peyre till my mother presented him to me as my future husband. A young girl must not think about love, or marriage either, till it becomes her duty to do so."

"Love is not a duty," I said, passionately, "it is a natural feeling, which comes all at once of itself."

I did not look at Madame La Peyre this time. I stared hard into the holly-hedge, and became aware that I had behaved like a goose.

Instead of getting my new guardian on my side—and how easily I can make people like me if I try!—I am only tightening my chain. She will, of course, consider my opinions dangerous and unsuitable, and will uphold my marriage if she hears of it. If I had only been quiet and gentle, I might have won her to my side, for I am sure she is gentle and loving.

I knelt upon the cushioned seat and waited for a lecture; but it did not come. Instead, I heard a little soft sigh.

I looked down into Madame La Peyre's face, and I saw her sweet, dark eyes swimming with tears.

People may say what they choose, I think when the eyes are sweet in middle age it is a sweetness far beyond any youthful beauty, it has such a steadfast charm; you are not afraid that it will be chased by an impatient frown, or a pouting under-lip, or a fretful droop of the whole countenance.

"My poor, dear Gertrude," she says so tenderly, that I slide down into the seat beside her, almost without my own will. "You have been thrown on the world too young; it is terrible for a woman!"

She puts her arm round me, and I nestle my head on her shoulder. For an instant I seem to have found my mother again.

Presently she says, softly:

"How old are you, Gertrude?"

"I was sixteen last January."

"And Eugène is twenty—poor, dear children!"

I am silent; I feel that Madame La Peyre knows my secret, and that she sympathizes with it. If I had remembered Eugène's promised letter at that moment, I should have told her of it.

"It is always unfortunate," she says, after a little, "when love comes before marriage; it is better that the husband's image should be the first that reflects itself in the heart of a young girl."

I am rebellious, but I cannot look at her. I cover my face with my hands.

"I only believe in first love, madame, and I will never marry where I do not love."

Madame La Peyre bends over me and strokes my hair. "You are a dear child, Gertrude, but you are more impulsive than your mother was."

The door opens, and Angélique comes in, and hands a note to Madame La Peyre. She seems to me still more remarkable-looking than I had thought her yesterday. She is very grave, but there is no sternness in her face. Her eyes are usually downcast; but she raises them as she speaks to her mistress, and they look quite lovingly at her. She is, I think, perfectly unconscious of her own distinguished appearance. She moves quietly about the room, doing humble little menial offices, while she waits for an answer to the note.

"I will not write"—Madame La Peyre looks up at her tall maid. "You can say that mademoiselle will pay a visit to madame very soon."

Angélique goes out of the room without looking at me. "I think Angélique is too dignified for a servant," I say to Madame La Peyre.

Again she laughs in the soft, silent way which so disconcerts me.

"You do not understand la mère Angélique. She is as unconscious of her dignity as she is unconscious that any one could think her worthy of notice. If you were sick or sorrowful, Gertrude, then she would make you the chief object of her care; but she sees you young, and bright, and happy, and I have no doubt she will pray for you, my child."

I remember Rosalie's warning.

"She is a kind of saint, is she not?" I said it mockingly, for my idea of a saint at

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that time was of a person who said long prayers, and sat in judgment on his or her neighbors.

"She does not think herself one; but I shall leave you and Angélique to make friends as you please. Now, if you are willing, we will go to my invalid, Madame Dayrell."

CHAPTER XVI.

THE INVALID.

MADAME DAYRELL'S room is opposite to mine, on the other side of the gallery.

"How is she, your sister, madame?" I ask, as we go up-stairs.

"My husband's mother married twice. Her second husband was an Englishman—Mr. Dayrell. This lady married my half brother-in-law, Henry Dayrell."

"She is English, then?"

Madame nods, and opens the door.

It is a large, pleasant room, but I scarcely see any thing in it except the invalid. Mrs. Dayrell lies on a sofa near the open window. She looks young, and as if she had been beautiful; but she is too wasted and haggard for beauty now. She has large, blue eyes, but there is a wild, dilated expression in them which troubles me; her long, fair hair streams round her shoulders, and sets her face in a golden frame. I suppose she has had a good complexion, but it is too hectic now. There is a painful unrest in her whole face which to me destroys its charm.

She looks at me discontentedly.

"Is this thy Gertrude?" she says to Madame La Peyre. Then to me: "Why did you not come to see me sooner? I thought you were a little girl—a child—not a grown-up person. Ah! I don't believe any one ever had so many disappointments as I have had."

I stood still and felt very uncomfortable, but Madame La Peyre goes to the sofa, turns the cushions under Mrs. Dayrell's shoulders, and speaks, in a bright voice:

"Is she not a tall girl for sixteen, my Barbara? but look at her eyes, and thou wilt not be disappointed—they are childish enough. My idea is that we shall not succeed in making her a *femme raisonnable*. What dost thou think? is it worth while to try?"

Such a mocking smile curves Mrs. Dayrell's lips.

"I do not see how thou canst try." She speaks French to Madame La Peyre. "It is only the world and the bondage of society that do either, and she will find neither restraint nor society here."

The first troubled look I have seen comes on Madame La Peyre's face.

"But yet, my Barbara, she will find restraints here, as she will everywhere; it is not good for us women to be without them."

The flush deepens on Mrs. Dayrell's face.

"Are you going to let Angélique preach to her?" she says, so bitterly that I look up at Madame La Peyre with a sudden suspicion that Mrs. Dayrell is unkindly treated. Madame smiles at me.

"I do not think Angélique preaches, Barbara; this little Gertrude has not thy powers of argument. She and Angélique will live side by side all tranquilly. I fancy she will only get preached to if she tears her gowns among the Tors, and it seems to me probable that this may happen. *Allons*, my child, we will go and make acquaintance with Merdon. As yet you have only seen it through the window."

I followed her to the door.

"Come back here." Mrs. Dayrell speaks in so despotic a manner that I obey at once. "Stoop down, child;" and then she whispers, "Come by yourself next time."

Madame La Peyre has not even looked back; she stands holding the door open for me to pass out. I feel very uncomfortable. There is something weird and painful in the look of those strained eyes, and that long, lifeless figure, with its white drapery, and fair, flowing hair.

Is Mrs. Dayrell mad, I wonder, and is Angélique her keeper? She looks unhappy and haughty, but I do not think she is mad. I try to speak of her to Madame La Peyre when at last we go out of the house, but she does not hear what I say; she is looking instead at the little gate of the church-yard. Some one is sitting there, but he does not see us; at least, I think he does not, for he comes down the steps whistling, with his hands in his pockets, and takes the road that curves round toward the station.

"Who is that?" The sight of that youth—I do not think he is much older than Eugène—cheers me, for Mrs. Dayrell's description of Merdon life has made me feel dull.

"That is our squire here, Mr. Frank New-

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ton; but this is not his only property, so we do not see much of him."

"He calls on you sometimes, then?"

Madame La Peyre considers me with one of those provoking smiles, and then she says, quietly, "Yes, he called two days ago with his tutor to say 'Good-by.'"

I feel rather vexed—I do not know why. I certainly have plenty to think of, and I have to look forward to Eugène's letter. Why do I trouble myself about that youth? He is short, and he has red cheeks and black whiskers, and I do not like rosy-faced men, they are so like apples. But Merdon will be very dull if there is nothing young in it. I want to go scrambling among those gray rocks I see, but I cannot expect Madame La Peyre to scramble, and it is not much fun to scramble by one's self.

We walk past the church in silence.

It occurs to me I may as well find out where I shall have to ask for Eugène's letter.

"Which is the post-office, madame?"

"We have passed it."

I suppose I look disappointed, for she turns back at once, and leads the way to one of the cottages, with the apple-tree before its window.

She pushes open the garden-gate and goes in. The letter-box is fixed just beside the open window. An old, sunburnt man stands beside a desk here, but he is so eagerly intent on speaking to some one within the room that he does not even hear our footsteps outside.

Madame La Peyre stops beneath the window.

"I should like for to know what a papist can tell about the good God, as ye call He, tellin' I as lumbago be sent for good!—Tellee tain't; pain, and sin, and ill-favoredness, is all bad—no good in any of they. Ne'er a one o' the three comes from above; they's sent direct from t'other place!"

"My good Samuel," comes in Angélique's calm, clear, broken English, "I am grieve to have vex you; instead, I wish to give you comfort, believe me. Will you that I come this night and put to your lumbago one famous plaster, which I have the great secret to make?"

Samuel growls to himself, but I see him shake his head.

"Ee means well; but, Mrs. Angelick, I be goin' seventy, an' I be not a-goin' to try new remedies at my years. Jint-ile did for my father and my grandfather afore he. No offense to ye, ma'am, but it 'ud be putting too great an affront on they to give in to furrin doctoring. Jint-ile I sticks by; it be all the cure I looks to."

"It is no offense, my good Samuel, and I wish that you may not suffer beyond your power to bear it. Adieu."

Angélique comes out of the door, but she disappears into the next cottage.

"Drat the woman!"—Samuel does not yet see us so near the window—"hur don't think small beer o' hurself. Can't hur see hur ain't got the right way o' looking at the complaint. I says lumbago be a cuss, and hur say it be a blessin'. If hur goes a-doctorin' lumbago for a blessin', safe as a bank 'twill turn it to a cuss. Drat all papists! it's always their way!"

Madame La Peyre nods at me, and we go in at the door. This opens into a large, square room, floored with the same kind of stone that I had noticed at Madame La Peyre's, and which madame told me was lime-ash. There is the same large open fireplace, but no fire in it; and on the mantelshelf above, and in a corner cupboard beneath the window, I see some quaint-looking blue-and-white crockery. The window attracts me; a table filled with flowers stands beneath it, and in the centre of these is a creeping plant I never saw before, covered with blue bell-shaped blossoms. I turn round to ask Madame La Peyre its name, but she has gone into the office through an open door-way on the right. The view is so lovely from the window that I wonder how Samuel can block it out, even with flowers. I go in to look at Samuel.

He is quite different to what I expected. Tall, thin, and reverend-looking, with white hair, and a clear, sunburnt face. His eyes are small, and set too near together, and his lips press each other so tightly that they are colorless; but he looks incapable of uttering the harsh judgment he passed on Angélique just now.

Madame La Peyre must have been speaking of me, for, when I came in, she says:

"Here is the young lady, Samuel; she only left my brother yesterday. You know Monsieur l'Abbé, do you not, Samuel?"

I think I see his face twist as he bows over his desk to Madame La Peyre. I wonder he does not offer us chairs.

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"Has the young lady any pitticklar business with the post-office?" He gives me such a keen look that I feel myself blushing.

"She will have letters," says madame, sweetly.—"Your father will write to you, Gertrude, and your sisters?"

"Yes;" and then a rapid thought comes to help me. "Mr. Samuel, I prefer to come and get my letters myself. They will be addressed to the post-office to Miss Stewart or Miss Gertrude Stewart."

I see Samuel's eyes give a sudden twinkle, and he looks hard at Madame La Peyre, but she is not watching him. She laughs at me, and says, teasingly:

"You strange girl; I suppose you think it will be a little daily event to come here and ask for your letters; but you will have to write and give your new address."

"Oh, no; I have given it already. I have so few correspondents that I shall scarcely need to come once a week even; but still I prefer to come myself." I look very decidedly at Samuel, and I do not like his face. It seems to me my frankness must silence his suspicions, but he half closes one eye as he listens.

CHAPTER XVII.

I TAKE A WALK.

THE rainy weather has lasted a week. Mrs. Dayrell has been so ill that I have not seen her again. I grow each day fonder of Madame La Peyre; but I begin to find it dull to be cooped up in one room all day. I want to go out in the rain.

"Yes, afterward," says madame; "but you cannot go out alone at first; you may lose yourself, my child. Angélique or I will guide you a little, and then you will be free to choose your own walks, for you may go alone here—you will meet no one."

I sigh at this; it is a dreary prospect to see no one in doors or out. I am sure if I do not get some amusement I shall do something mischievous.

It is afternoon now, and the rain is leaving off; the clouds are parting and drifting away. Where do clouds go to, I wonder? I stand watching, till at last there is a bit of blue sky.

"Madame, really we can get a walk now; in two minutes more it will be quite fine."

Angélique opens the door.

"Monsieur Newton and Monsieur Donald," she says, in her quaint accent.

All my repressed spirits dance up into my eyes; I can hardly restrain an exclamation. I have time to look at the visitors while madame is receiving them. Mr. Newton is the gentleman I saw at the church-yard. He is certainly very pippin-faced, and his young black whiskers are like curled-up fur on each side of his face; I do not feel interested in him. He is short, and he has a kind of face which you see all at once; there is nothing to find out in it but black and white and red. I look on to the tutor; he is younger than I expected, certainly much younger than Captain Brand. But he is ugly—at least, he has a pale, slipshod kind of face, by which I mean a face that has loose skin about the chin and forehead—a face that has a whimsical mouth which seems hesitating between a laugh and a cry, and a nose that looks as if it may be made to take any shape. He is tall, but he is awkward; he moves his shoulders nervously, and seems not to know what to do with his hands; and yet, this queer, Dominie-Sampson-looking creature interests me much more than the red-cheeked pupil. I do so dislike red cheeks.

Madame La Peyre presents these gentlemen to me, and then we all sit down. Mr. Newton looks at me quite coolly, as if I were a picture or a bit of china; but Mr. Donald looks away directly I meet his eyes.

"I thought you had departed," says madame.

"But we are back again, you see. We find Merdon more attractive than Starmouth; at least"—Mr. Newton pulled his whiskers—"I do."

He looks at me with an impressive expression in his large, brown, dog-like eyes.

I cannot help laughing to myself as I contrast this young Englishman with Eugène. How downright and ungraceful he is in his way of paying a compliment. He must be very young, or he is quite unused to girls.

I look at him mischievously.

"Is Merdon so attractive? I was afraid I should find it dull. What do you find attractive in it?" I ask, innocently.

Madame La Peyre looks surprised; I suppose she wonders that I speak so soon to a stranger—perhaps at home I might have waited—but I have been so quiet, and this

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chance of a little amusement may not come again soon, and there is Mr. Donald for her to talk to.

Mr. Newton is not so silly as I thought he was. He looks mischievous, too.

"Ah, you don't know. Yet we have had rain ever since you came. Wait till you have seen our Cleeve, and some of the rides in our neighborhood. I"—his voice gives a little flourish here, which nearly makes me laugh—"shall be most delighted, if you like riding, to give you a mount; I have some horses quite fit for a lady's riding."

"I don't know much about riding, thank you; I prefer walking. From the little I have seen, I should think walking is best here. I want to climb some of those great, gray rocks, and you can't do that on horseback."

"Not exactly. Well, then, if you walk, you had better let me guide you. I know every inch of the ground, and I will take every care of you."

He looks at me in such a fatherly, protecting way that I am determined to tease him. I believe he thinks I am a child. It will be great fun to make him fall in love with me to punish his conceit.

I look from him to Mr. Donald, and I am startled at the intense gaze I meet. This awkward, ugly man is not really ugly on second looks; he has beautiful dark-blue eyes—eyes that look full of tender, sentimental thoughts. I would much rather take a walk with Mr. Donald than with this young prig.

"My dear"—Madame La Peyre has been talking to the tutor—"I have been asking Mr. Donald to recommend me a list of English books for your reading, and he is so kind as to offer to lend you some."

I smile up in Mr. Donald's face. He is so shy that I feel inclined to be kind to him, and to make him like me. I can't help trying to make every one like me. I am miserable if I think they do not.

"Thank you very much."

Mr. Donald looks pleased.

"You must tell me the kind of reading you prefer." He speaks so very gently, and yet I am sure he is clever; he has that clear, refined way of speaking which only clever people have.

"I like poetry and novels."

Madame La Peyre looks at me, and then she gives one of her pretty, soft laughs.

"You must not trust her judgment; but I do not imagine that you, monsieur, read romances."

I keep my eyes on Mr. Donald, and he is actually blushing.

"I am afraid I am guilty of possessing some," he says, laughing; "but I do not think they will hurt Miss Stewart."

I had forgotten Mr. Newton till a yawn called my attention to him.

"I can't stand poetry," he said; "it seems all alike, and there is so much time wasted. I read some once—I think it was called 'Aurora Leigh'—and I often skipped a dozen pages without missing any of the story. But our family don't go in for extra learning—do we, Mr. Donald?"

"You tell me so."

I fancy there is a little mockery in the tutor's voice, but Mr. Newton's sentence has taken me back to Van Diemen's Land. I have grown lately to forget what then seemed so natural, that one's family creed is the only reliable standard of right and wrong. I blush with a mixture of shame and fear, and try to remember whether our family cares for poetry. As far as I can recollect, with the exception of our governess, no one read any thing at home except the newspapers, unless it was a book by some titled amateur. I fancy well-bred women ought to be very careful not to be clever or learned. I know papa used to tell me he cared more for playing and singing than for any other acquirement. The abbé and Madame La Peyre seem to be of a different way of thinking; but, then, they have lived in retirement, and I have heard people say that my father was a complete man of the world. I do not quite know what that is, but it must be, of course, something very clever.

"Are you going out?" Mr. Newton asks Madame La Peyre. I do not think he is quite at his ease in a drawing-room, though he has such a superior, patronizing manner, I suppose this is because of his family—but is he really well-born? I thought only under-bred people gave themselves airs, and then I remember my own behavior to Captain Brand, and I try to think of something else; for, of all things, I dislike to find myself in the wrong. I have no pretensions to being good. I have a horror of that sort of thing, but I cannot see how a person who is born a lady can bear to be rude.

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"We were thinking of it when you came in—shall we go, Gertrude?"

"Oh, yes, if you please."

I will not give Madame La Peyre the chance of changing her mind. I dart off for my hat, but I stay an instant to see that I have put it on well. Angélique has trimmed it with crape; she said it made me look pale, but to-day I have plenty of color. I can hardly remember how long it is since I took a country-walk with some one of my own age. There was that ramble with Eugène, but that was different. It is not Mr. Newton who will make this walk pleasant; it is the walk that will make me glad of him for a companion.

I find our *salon* empty, so I go out into the court. Mr. Newton is leaning against the gate.

"I want to take you to the Cleeve"—he looked very important—"by a way that has been in our family for centuries."

"Centuries! Why do you go back to the ancient Britons?"

"Well, you know that's a way of speaking, so to say," he said, with a drawl.

"I suppose you can tell me all sorts of legends about these misshapen Tors."

"Not I," in a lazy and lofty tone. "You must ask my tutor this kind of things; he cares for reading; you see education is necessary for the middle classes. *I* only go in for manly pursuits."

I feel puzzled. I begin to look up to Mr. Newton; he is certainly much cleverer than I am; he could not speak in such a positive, superior way, unless he felt he was really clever.

"I thought reading was more a man's pursuit than a woman's—a lofty pursuit, in fact," I say, shyly. "I mean real, deep reading."

Mr. Newton looks at me with an approving smile. I feel so glad to have been right.

"Yes—yes, oh yes, you are right there; women who are great readers are awful—they bore you. I have an aunt who can't talk of any thing but books, but then she don't read the paper, or any thing jolly. She actually did not know who won the Derby last spring."

I feel horribly ignorant.

"What did?" I look up into Mr. Newton's eyes with reverence.

"Oh, Ladybird, of course; but, Miss Stewart, why shouldn't we start? I'll tell Donald to wait for madame. He has gone on to look at this view farther up the lane. He is new to this country."

Mr. Newton is looking at me quite as admiringly as Eugène did. I begin to wonder which is the eldest. I think Mr. Newton is, though his face is younger, but he walks more like a man, and is so much calmer than Eugène was.

We come suddenly on Mr. Donald, gazing through a gap in the hedge. I should like to stand, and look, too, at the splendid range of hills—my friend, that misty, melancholy Dartmoor, always ending the view; but Mr. Newton will not stop.

"I say, Donald," he calls out, as we pass, "will you bring Madame La Peyre after us? I am going up the hill-field to the top of the Cleeve. If it is too steep for madame, she can rest in the field, you know."

We pass through the village, and then up a steep bit of high-road; then across a wooded hill, with lovely peeps of distant view here and there between the trees; and then we come to a gate. Mr. Newton opens it, and we pass into a shady lane.

If the walk is all to be like this lane, it will be delightful—steep banks, with trees meeting overhead, so that we are sheltered from the sun, which blazes fiercely, as if he were making up for his long absence—the path is so choked with huge blocks of granite, that one has constantly to scramble over them. I sit down at last on a gray fragment, with black and brown stains, orange and silver lichens blistering here and there.

"Where do these bits of rock come from?" I ask.

"Come from no one knows; they seem to grow; but this is nothing to what you will see in the Cleeve. Donald will talk to you by the yard about these formations, as he calls them, but what does it matter how they come—I wish they'd go, they're an awful nuisance; they only cumber the land and keep it barren for acres."

I pointed to the ferns niched in every available cranny of the piled-up hedge-bank.

"You mean those plants grow, but they're not fodder. You see I am thoroughly practical with regard to Nature. I look at it with the eye of a land-owner, and that black spleen won't benefit any one but an herb-doctor."

I see more and more that my first judgment was hasty. Mr. Newton must be very clever, though he has rosy cheeks.

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We have come in sight of another gate.

"Here we are," he says, as he holds it open. "When we have climbed to the top of this field, you will look down into the Cleeve. You had better rest, had you not?"

The climb certainly looked formidable; the field is really the side of a hill, or of a very lofty embankment, and it is so encumbered with blocks of granite of every size and form, that one might fancy the huge masses of rock which crown its summit had been giant chiefs in some great battle fought hereabouts, and petrified with the stain below.

Patches of grass assert themselves at intervals, and on this some sheep are feeding. A lark is singing overhead, and a couple of yellow birds hop from one stone to another, and look at us with their little inquisitive heads on one side. I sit down on the stone to which Mr. Newton points, but I wish he would leave off his agricultural explanations. I want to be quite silent, and feast my eyes on the scene below us. We have climbed high enough to overlook Merdon nestling round its church-tower amid the sheltering poplars, and I can trace the windings of the little brook, circling like a silver fringe at the feet of the quaintly-shaped hills that rise many-colored behind the village. I see newly-ploughed earth beside the yellowish-green of fading vegetables, and shouldering these comes an abrupt stretch of purple moor, with a huge gray rock for centre.

But solitude is hopeless, for Mr. Newton is still holding forth, and I see Madame La Peyre and Mr. Donald coming through the gate toward us.

I am very capricious; five minutes ago, though his talk disturbed me, I liked to feel that, while I sat looking at the yellow-hammers, Mr. Newton's eyes were fixed on my face, but I hail the coming interruption, and I dart off to tell some of my delight to Madame La Peyre. My foot slips, and I lose my balance. I hear a shout, and then a scream—and then the ground goes upside down, and I am aware of a concussion—and then I am raised tenderly but strongly, and I open my eyes and see Mr. Donald's face close to mine.

"Oh, my darling," says Madame La Peyre. "Let me find where she is hurt, Mr. Donald."

But Mr. Donald seems to put Madame La Peyre gently aside.

"I will carry her home to your maid, madame. I am sure there ought to be no delay."

I am beginning to feel a sharp pain in my wrist, and I am sore all over; but Mr. Donald's alarm amuses me.

"You can put me down, thank you," I say. "I am not near dying yet."

I watch his face, and he looks very grave. He sets me down gently on some smooth grass.

But my head swims so that I catch desperately at his arm, and cling to him.

"You must take her up again," says madame, very sadly, "but I am afraid she is too heavy for you."

I suppose Mr. Newton has just come down to us.

"Of course. Let me carry Miss Stewart, Donald. I am ever so much stronger than you are."

Mr. Donald does not seem to hear his pupil. He proceeds to raise me. I catch a glimpse of Mr. Newton looking absolutely savage, and, in spite of my pain, I laugh. It is so amusing to make him jealous.

"I think I feel safest with Mr. Donald, thank you," I say, "he is so tall. Now Mr. Donald has begun, I had rather he'd finish."

It is not very comfortable anyway, and I am delighted when Madame La Peyre tells Mr. Newton to hurry on for Mrs. Dayrell's garden-chair.

"It would be no use in the lane," she says, "but the path through the wood is smoother."

I am sure I am very heavy, for I can feel how hard Mr. Donald breathes as we get near the end of the lane.

Madame La Peyre persuades him to rest against the gate, but he soon goes on again.

"Here comes Mr. Newton," says madame, when we are half-way along the wood-path.

"The chair is at the gate," he says, breathlessly. I believe he must have fractured that poor chair in dragging it along so fast. "It is too wide to pass through the gate," he gasps; "now, Donald, you're as white as a sheet; let me carry Miss Stewart."

"I can walk now, if you will let me lean on your arm." I say this very softly to Mr. Donald; it is horrible to think that he is so exhausted, and yet I cannot let that little red-cheeked Mr. Newton touch me, we might

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both go down together. "Put me down," I say, decidedly.

I am so sore and stiff that I can hardly keep in a scream as my feet touch the ground; my head feels light and confused, but I have no longer that swimming faintness.

I look up gratefully at Mr. Donald; he is not pale, he has flushed up to his temples.

"Thank you very, very much." I say so that only he can hear me, and I press my hand gratefully on his arm.

I think that men like gratitude and marks of friendship to be quite private. I am quite sure Mr. Donald valued my thanks much more than if I had spoken them out. He drew my hand closely into his arm.

"You must lean on me more heavily than that," he said.

Why are some men born awkward who yet don't look amiss, and others who look awkward are so tender and skillful in all they do to help? Mr. Newton walks excellently, and I have no doubt he is a good dancer, and adroit in manly exercises; while Mr. Donald is, by comparison, shambling and knock-kneed, and yet how carefully and easily he has moved me to-day! When we reach the chair he bends forward to unfasten the apron, and Mr. Newton comes close beside me.

"Let me help you in," he says, in an aggrieved voice; "you won't let me do any thing."

He takes the hand which all this time has been hanging useless by my side. I did not want Madame La Peyre to know that it was hurt.

Mr. Newton's grasp is like a knife. I give a sudden shriek, and fall on Mr. Donald's shoulder. There is a hubbub of inquiry, and then I open my eyes and laugh.

"I beg your pardon."

I mean to look sweetly at Mr. Newton, but the mixture of dismay and anger in his face is too ludicrous; I laugh, without any power to check myself.

At last I find my voice, and see that he has grown crimson.

"I beg your pardon, but I believe that wrist is sprained."

CHAPTER XVIII.

AN UNEXPECTED VISITOR.

It seemed as if I were doomed not to explore the Cleeve. My wrist was severely sprained, and I was so sore and shaken, that I was obliged to content myself with being drawn about in Mrs. Dayrell's chair whenever I wanted to go beyond the village. Mr. Donald and Mr. Newton were very kind, but, after that first day, they came separately. This confirmed me in my theory. I am quite sure it is a mistake to talk to one man before another. A man likes to think, even if he knows better, that a woman only talks to him. I am glad, therefore, that these gentlemen come separately, for they both like to talk to me, and I am able to be equally kind to both, without any trouble. I believe I am fondest of Mr. Donald, but, for that very reason, I do not want him to know it. I am always grateful to him for having carried me home, although it was so very uncomfortable. But he is so kind; he brings me books, and reads poetry to me, but sometimes, when I look up suddenly, he is staring at me with such a sentimental look that I nearly laugh, and I believe, if I did laugh at him, he would be hurt. Mr. Newton does not bring books, but he makes me laugh; he has all sorts of amusing stories about the village people; I must go and see some of them when I am able to go about again. I am longing to be free, for I feel sure there is a letter for me from Eugène.

I have seen Mrs. Dayrell once or twice, but she depresses me; she looks so sad, and her manner is so imperious.

Angélique has just come to summon me to her.

Madame La Peyre looks up from her embroidery.

"Do not stay long, Gertrude; talking makes Barbara cough."

I have remarked that madame never proposes that I should go to her sister-in-law, and that she seems unwilling that I should go at all. But then, first, I am contradictory; and, next, this house is very dull when one has to stay in it so much; I could not exist without Mr. Donald and Frank Newton—he has told me his name is Frank—and on the days between their visits I get restless, and I gape.

"I will not make her cough," and then, to

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make amends for a secret delight I take in teasing Madame La Peyre on this subject, I go and kiss her and hug her till she cries out I am spoiling her cap.

"Au revoir." I kiss my hand to her, and skip after Angélique.

"Angélique," I say, following her upstairs, "you are a hard-hearted woman after all, I see."

Angélique does not look round, but I can see her peculiar, grave smile; her eyes smile as well as her lips, so that, though the smile is grave, it lights up her whole face.

"Why does mademoiselle say I have a so hard heart?"

She asks this so meekly, with such a perfect acceptation of my accusation, that I am ashamed. I go close to her, and pinch her close-fitting black sleeve.

"I mean that you don't care really for me. When my wrist was so bad you were as good and tender as you could be. Why, you sat up with me all that first night, and I thought you an old dear, and now you take no more notice of me than you do of the pigs in the yard."

We had reached the landing. Angélique paused before Mrs. Dayrell's door, and looked at me gravely.

"Of what service could my notice be to mademoiselle?"

"Don't be so pragmatical, Angélique. Ah! I see you do not understand that word. I mean that one does not care for things only for use, one likes them for pleasure too, and it is my pleasure in life to make every creature love me."

Angélique's smile faded away; she looked unutterably sad.

"That is the most dangerous of pleasures;" and then, as if it were a part of her phrase, she went on: "Mademoiselle will only stay a so little time with madame;" she nodded toward the door. "Madame has been awake this night, and she should repose."

I made no answer. She knocked, and then I went in as soon as I heard Mrs. Dayrell's voice. How sharp and querulous it sounded after Angélique's quiet words!

It was not a very warm day; the leaves were blowing about in a September gale, and gray masses of cloud drifted away from one hill to another like Noah's dove, but Mrs. Dayrell's window was open, and her face had the same deep flush that I had noticed on that hot August morning when I first saw her.

"I thought you were never coming, Gertrude.—You need not stay, my mother."

Mrs. Dayrell was always more civil to Angélique than to any one; there seemed to be some link between them; she usually called her "my mother."

I had lost my awe of this strange, wild-looking woman.

I went and shook hands with her; she never offered me a kiss, and then she pointed to a low chair opposite her sofa.

"Sit there to-day. I want to watch your face; it is like a landscape in April, where one can see the clouds and the sunshine without looking skyward."

I felt myself blush.

"Why do you say such uncomfortable things? How can I be natural if you make me think how I am looking?"

Mrs. Dayrell laughed.

Her laugh was like her voice, so hard and solitary; it seemed to be entirely for her own enjoyment; there was no invitation in it to share her amusement.

"You are so amusing, child, that you ought to come to me every day; but you really must learn to control your face—you are pouting violently."

I jumped up and went to the window; it was impossible to sit still and be examined as if I were a stuffed bird. All at once I lean forward and look beyond the garden; Frank Newton is crossing the brook; he has a gun, and two dogs are following him in the most orderly fashion.

"Who is that?" says the sharp voice. "Your shoulders tell me you see some one, child."

"Only Mr. Newton." I speak without turning round.

"I asked for you yesterday, child, and then I heard that you were reading poetry with Mr. Donald. To-day you are staring after Mr. Newton, and you are a little past sixteen, Gertrude, and sometimes you look twenty. What is my sister about?"

I felt that Mrs. Dayrell ought not to talk in this way to me, it was so unlike my mother and Madame La Peyre; and yet she fascinated me. I did so long for a talk on the forbidden topic, love! My recent readings with Mr. Donald had much increased this longing. We had been reading "The Prin-

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cess." Yesterday he had read to me the "Miller's Daughter," and Mr. Donald had brought me a volume of Coleridge—for the "Ancient Mariner," he said—but I had found something I liked much better than that hobgoblin story, a little poem called "Love." After all, if my mother had lived she would probably now let me talk about love. It seems to me that it is a woman's real existence if she thinks. What used I to think about till I knew Eugène? Nothing.

"Why are you so silent?" Mrs. Dayrell was getting vexed. "I did not send for you that I might look at all those plaits of hair. Come and sit down, and be glad that you can move your limbs, and are not condemned to be on this wretched sofa. Well, now, which do you prefer, Mr. Newton or the tutor?"

She put up both her thin hands, and strained her hair off her face, till her eyes looked larger than ever. I had no pleasure in looking at her, she was so fevered and hectic. She looked at me so searchingly, that I smiled.

"I don't know. Mr. Newton amuses me, and Mr. Donald interests me."

She looked quite eager at this.

"Interests you, does he? I did not think there was any one interesting in Merdon. Madame La Peyre should bring him to see me. Bah! I forget; at your age every one interested me. Ah! my dear little simpleton, enjoy life while you can."

"You are always saying this kind of things." I spoke pettishly. I did not like to be called a simpleton. "I may be foolish, but other people take an interest in life besides me. There is Madame La Peyre—no one could be gayer; and Angélique never looks sad."

Mrs. Dayrell tossed back her hair impatiently. I noticed how the blue veins stood out on her temples.

"It is easy to a bird or a butterfly to be gay," she said, "but you have a deeper nature than Madame La Pyre has, Gertrude, and I warn you to enjoy life while you can, and while even a tutor can interest you. But tell me how Mr. Donald interests you, child."

Something in her look—I cannot tell what it was—brought the blood flying to my face.

"Oh, I don't know; he brings me books, and we read together."

"Poetry or prose?"

"Poetry;" and then I felt mischievous; her fixed gaze provoked me. "Do you know a little poem about Geneviève, called 'Love?' I read that yesterday."

I suppose Mrs. Dayrell was too clever to be deceived.

"You may read what you like with Mr. Donald, child; but now listen to me: don't read poetry. If you want to enjoy life, and to be gay and bright as long as possible, you must not read about love, Gertrude; do not even think of it."

"What harm can thinking do"—I broke out, angrily, my face on fire—"if there is no one to fall in love with?"

Mrs. Dayrell raised herself a little. She looked at me curiously.

"She is not such a child, after all;" and then she fell back on her pillows, and lay quiet.

I feel so angry when Mrs. Dayrell speaks of me as if I were a bit of wood, that I am inclined to leave her by herself.

"You may soon be in love with a creature of your own making," she says, presently, "if you go on reading love-poems, and encouraging sentiment. Leave yourself alone, child; women have too much feeling without putting themselves into a forcing-house. Have as many admirers as you please, Gertrude; you will never be in want of them while you keep that face and figure; but you must not love one among them, if you mean to enjoy life."

I blushed. I shrunk from this talk, and yet it fascinated me.

"But do you then agree with Madame La Peyre, that one should not love one's husband before marriage?"

"Nor after, either;" her face grew stern, and her voice more and more imperious. "Did you not hear me say that women have too much feeling? Don't look unbelieving, you foolish, headstrong child. I am not talking theory; I am no sentimental spinster preaching doctrine she has not tried. Do you want to know what happens, Gertrude, to a woman who loves her husband?"

I felt interested, and yet thoroughly prejudiced. I did not believe Mrs. Dayrell had ever loved any one, she was so bitter in look and tone.

"If a woman loves"—I saw her lips smile at my rebellious face—"she always spoils the man she loves, and makes him a tyrant. A husband soon tires of a wife's

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love, Gertrude, but he will not give it up; it must remain his, however little store he may set by it, and he resents most unjustly and tyrannically any pleasure she may take in any other admiration."

"I should think so; what right has a wife to any admiration but her husband's?"

I spoke heartily. This was the creed I had been taught in my home. I felt as if Mrs. Dayrell were wicked, and I imagine my eyes told her so.

She blushed over face and throat, even her delicate hands trembled with agitation; but she laughed still, and there was the mockery in her voice which so alienated me.

"You have true bread-and-butter ideas, Gertrude, and very good for you so long as you had a mother to keep the bandage over your eyes; but you have not, child. Life must be more true and real to you than it is to most girls of sixteen. I tell you, you have in you a power of deep, passionate love; your only hope of happiness lies in not yielding to it."

"Why? Every thing teaches that love is true happiness; so it seems to me I have an extra chance. I have only to take care that I love where I am loved."

She shook her head.

"You may go now; either you cannot or you will not understand that feeling is a source of misery, not happiness. Be as changeable, as inconstant as you choose, that will give you endless amusement, and will help to deaden feeling; but, whatever else you may do, never marry for love."

She closed her eyes, and I went away. I did not want to meet Angélique, to incur a rebuke for staying so much longer than usual with Mrs. Dayrell. I was so full of new thoughts that I must get away where I could think them out quietly without interruption. I went to my room, got my hat and a book, and then set off, determined to find my own way to the Cleeve.

My accident had taught me caution, and, though I knew I was late in setting out, I climbed slowly and carefully up, when I reached the stony field. A little higher than the point where we had rested, the rocks were so large and closely piled that I had to seek for spaces between them; even my love of danger shrank from climbing these bare, rough masses. I paused, at last, out of breath, and felt giddy as I looked behind me; my last quarter of an hour's climb had been almost perpendicular, but I did not linger, though Merdon and its surrounding hills looked exquisite in the brilliant sunshine. A yet steeper bit than any I had surmounted, and I should be at the top, and Frank Newton had told me the top looked into the Cleeve.

Some laughing voices made me hesitate, and presently a small, pretty-faced woman passed along the ridge above me; two donkeys followed; there was a young girl on each donkey, and the whole party looked startlingly massive against the blue sky.

I heard them say something about me and my accident, and I guessed that it was Mrs. Tracey, the rector's wife, and her daughters.

I wonder why Mr. Donald speaks so coldly of them. They look very nice.

My heart warmed at the sight of something young. It would be great fun to have the Traceys to scramble about with. But in a minute more I had forgotten them and Mr. Donald too, for I reached the ridge, and looked down at last into the Cleeve, a very steep valley, some miles in length, and about a mile and a half across, from the rugged brow on which I stood to the green hills opposite.

Down, so far below that the trees hide it, is a brawling river; it must be fighting its way among rocks, from the noise which reaches me, even at this height above. The steep cliff I stand on is cumbered with fragments of gray rock, and as far as I can see on either hand these are piled one atop of another in the most irregular confusion; some like old castles with broken battlements, on others yellow furze is in gay blossom; on one close below me a mountain-ash has found a crevice for its roots, and stands now in the full glory of its scarlet berries, their color made more intense by the setting sun; some are gold with lichen spots, and sombre with ivy; on my right a complete ivy-tree has masked the rock, except at its base, where lady-ferns hold up their dainty plumes above the little gem-like flowers below them.

The ash-trees which bend closely over the river, clothe the opposite hills some way up, and then beyond this grassed crest other hills rise in all sorts of varied forms, till a range of far-off, long-stretching down ends the

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view. To my right, the valley loses itself among thick woods; but to the left, beyond the ivy-tree, it goes on broadening, till it seems to me it must reach the sea itself, so wide and boundless is the extent of the horizon. But all the view, both this way and opposite, grows each moment more indistinct; there floats up from the valley a tender veil of mist, which makes all luminous and harmonious. Overhead the deep-blue sky has paled from its mid-day intensity; a faint cloud-wreath stretches away in a line with the setting sun, and below is a soft hue of no definite color; it seems as if every tender tint had melted into one. Through the gauze-like mist the meadows on the hill-side show out emerald; on the down above the wooded height the heather gives a crimson tone, mingled with brown; the fantastic rocks, piled one atop of another, so that it seems they must overbalance their huge, moss-stained weight, grow more and more sombre in tone, and yet some of them take phantom shapes as they loom through the soft, misty veil.

The beauty all round me, the exquisite tenderness of the atmosphere, soothe away the disturbance which Mrs. Dayrell had roused. I sit down and think about her quietly.

I wonder why she attracts me at all. I always come away from her sore and disheartened, and I don't think Madame La Peyre really likes her. I suppose she fascinates me because she is clever and unlike any one else, but she makes life out miserable. Did she love her husband? and is it his death that has soured her?

And then I wonder whether Mr. Dayrell really was dead. I have not heard that Mrs. Dayrell was a widow. Her words come back; is it, then, possible that love could change? Will Eugène forget me? Ah! no; but then Eugène and I really love each other, and Mrs. Dayrell may not have been really loved. I turn from these troubling thoughts to count the weeks that must pass before I can receive my father's letter. I am sure he will refuse to sanction my marriage; I know his aristocratic prejudices are stronger than my mother's were. It is now September; if my father writes directly, I can get his letter in December, at latest in January, and then I will tell Madame La Peyre at once about Eugène.

If I could only sleep away the time that comes between! I get up and look round.

The sun has sunk much lower; suddenly every bit of color is intensified; the meadow shows greener yet against the velvet olive of the woods. The furze shines out with a more golden yellow, the ash-berries with a yet more scarlet tinge, only for a short while, and then the sun dips behind the farthest hill, and the color flies skyward, leaving a hue velvet-like in softness on all below, while it spreads a rosy glow over the spot where its creator departed.

I look down to the wooded river, and I see some one coming up from among the misty trees. It is so dusk down there that I cannot see distinctly; it may either be a man or a cow, but I am a little frightened. The creature is so far off that very likely it has not seen me. I turn to go home; but it is much more difficult to climb down these rough, upright crags than it was to scale them. I wish most intensely for Mr. Donald's help, or even for Frank Newton.

I stop at last out of breath. I feel ready to cry, now that there is no one to seem brave before.

But I don't think one is brave only from humbug. There is an excitement in companionship which helps.

A stone rattles down past me. I look behind me in terror, and I see a man standing on the ridge. He is looking down into the Cleeve, so his back is toward me; he looks gigantic, looming there against the green-gray sky.

My heart beats in a flutter. I do not know what I fear, but a stranger seems something portentous to Merdon. I can get on faster now; the bits of rock are farther apart, and I can wind in and out without climbing; but still I remember my fall, and I move cautiously, as till I reach the grass at the bottom of [illegible] have scent.

[illegible]ing,

As I reach the white gate I [illegible]. My man is coming down the rocks like a goat, springing from one to another far more easily than Frank Newton climbed them.

I stand a minute to watch him, and then I speed through the gate, letting it slam behind me. It is not a stranger at all; it is Captain Brand, and he saw me, and he is hurrying over the rocks to overtake me.

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CHAPTER XIX.

CAPTAIN BRAND AGAIN.

"I THOUGHT it was you. I am so glad!"

He had overtaken me in a minute, and here he is actually with both my hands in his, as if he were my lover.

He looks like a lover too; his eyes are quite bright, and he fixes them on me so intently that I have to turn away, I am so vexed, for my cheeks burn — of course he thinks I am blushing with delight at seeing him, and it is only because of the fear and the haste I have made.

I force myself to appear quite cool.

"How well you look!" his eyes are more admiring than Frank Newton's, and there is such a sparkle of delight in them. I ought not to be cross; the poor man cannot help admiring me, I suppose.

"I need not ask if Merdon suits you, or if you are happy, Gertrude."

My face clouds over. I wish Captain Brand would call me Miss Stewart, and yet I shrink from telling him so, because I want to prevent any of that kind of talk which we had in the cabin of the Eclair—I turn away and begin to climb along the stony lane.

"Yes, thank you, I like Madame La Peyre extremely."

"I ought to have written to you, but I have been very busy, and I have been traveling constantly. You will forgive me?"

He speaks quite penitently; does he really think I should take the trouble to read his letters? But I have grown to feel so sure of my future freedom that I am able to be more friendly to Captain Brand, and I remember only the kindness he has shown me.

thoug[illegible]e at him; I feel rather mischiev-
think
I am not good at writing or at reading letters either. I think it is waste of time."

Really, I did not think Captain Brand could throw so much expression into his eyes—he is admiring me again. I suppose it would be more dignified to look as if I did not like his admiration, but then it does not hurt me, and he seems to like it.

"But you cannot have much to do with your time down here"—he walks as close beside me as the stones will let him—"and do you know, Gertrude, I have been quite looking forward to some letters from you while I am in the north. I think"—he hesitates, and I look up at him, but there is something in his face I do not like—surely he has forgotten all I said to him on board the Eclair. I get as far away from him as I can—"I think," he goes on quietly, "it may be better for us both to write letters to each other."

"I cannot promise to write." There is the old dislike in my voice, for I am thinking of Eugène, and how cruelly Captain Brand came between us that morning.

"My child"—his voice vibrates, and I feel angry and inclined to laugh all at once—"trust me, that is all I ask of you now, but you cannot have faith in me till you know more of me; and, unless I write to you, what chance have I—I—of speaking out?"

It is such a relief to hear the click of the gate at the end of the lane, and we are quite near it, although we cannot see it, because of a bend in the path. I hear a stick striking sharply against the stones, and the next minute there is Frank Newton whistling "Home, Sweet Home," which I sung to him on his last visit. I hurry on, and come in sight of him while Captain Brand is still hidden.

"Ah, Miss Stewart, is it you? and have you really been up the Cleeve alone? Why did you not give me the happiness"—here Captain Brand came in view. I watch Frank Newton's face, it is such fun; first his mouth opens, and his jaw droops as if it were going to fall off altogether, and then he turns fiery red. I cannot help it, I begin to laugh.

"Well, I don't know," I said, "I might have fallen as I did last time, and I do not think you could have carried me home by yourself."

"Did you fall on those rocks?" cried Captain Brand, in a horrified voice.

All my new liking for him vanishes; he speaks as if I belonged to him, as if he had some sort of control over me.

I answer without looking at him:

"Yes, I fell — running down to the gate."

I suppose my indifferent manner provokes him—he speaks so sternly.

"How can you be so careless? you might have killed yourself."

I do not think I ever felt so angry. Captain Brand had been admiring and submissive five minutes ago, and now he is treating me like a naughty child before Frank Newton.

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"Well"—I try to look as if I were very much amused, and I glance at Frank to show him that I think he ought to be amused too —"I did not kill myself, and I did not hurt anybody else;" then I feel that I really can torment Captain Brand and Frank at the same time: "I tired the friend who carried me home I am afraid; how kind he was!"

"No kindness at all," says Frank, sulkily; "why, any one would be too glad to be of use to you; of course it is a happiness;" here he pulls at those dear little curly whiskers till I feel sure he hurts himself.

"You should not tell me so, for see what might happen;" I try to look as sweet as possible; it would be a comfort if I could see whether Captain Brand looks cross, but he keeps walking just behind Frank and me—between us—we are on opposite sides of the lane, and I know he can see both our faces. "I am so kind-hearted that I may grow to consider it my duty to fall down the rocks periodically, just to give happiness to my fellow-creatures."

Actually, Frank does not see I am teasing —he strides eagerly over a huge stone in the path and walks close beside me.

"I don't like that word," he says, in a low voice; "I don't like to think *you* only consider me a fellow-creature."

I am sorry to say I laugh a little. Men ought to be very careful to keep exactly to their own characters when they talk to me; any thing that seems to me like acting is sure to make me laugh.

Mr. Donald often looks sentimental, but then his great blue eyes are fit for sentiment, there is plenty of room in them; but Frank Newton's eyes are small and dry-looking, there is so little of them that I see nothing but the whites; the thought that comes to me is, that he is making himself look more like a fish than a fellow-creature; here it comes into my head that it will do Captain Brand good to see how many admirers I have.

"Well, a friend, then," and then I look up at Frank; his eyes have come down, he looks delighted.

"I don't know how to thank you."

I wish he would not speak so distinctly. I want Captain Brand to see that we are talking nonsense, but there is no need that he should hear all we say.

"Please, will you open the gate?" I look forward and Frank darts off, and stands holding it open wide enough for a drove of bulls to pass.

"Who is that, Gertrude?"

Captain Brand speaks in the harshest way to a woman. I shall just teach him at once that he is not to speak so to me.

I look up at him; he is frowning, but I do not feel at all frightened now by his angry looks.

"Mr. Newton is a great friend of mine; he owns all this property."

I hold my head very stiffly, and then I move on to join Frank at the gate.

I feel sorry already. I had resolved that, when next Captain Brand came to Merdon, I would try to conciliate him, and get him to promise not to say any thing to Madame La Peyre about the marriage. I always think of it as *the* marriage—it never was mine. And now I have made him angry, and also given up the only chance of saying a private word to him before he sees Madame La Peyre.

"Who is that?" Frank asks, when I reach the gate; "is he a friend of yours?"

I blush; I see by his manner he thinks that Captain Brand is hardly the sort of person to be called my friend.

"He is my guardian," and I look up at Frank Newton and give a sigh of weariness.

"Come along." Frank let the gate swing-to, and on we went, without troubling ourselves about Captain Brand.

"Guardians and governesses are people to be left behind," says Frank, laughing in a complacent way, as if he had said something really clever; "now, Donald is a capital fellow, considering he's a tutor—so easy-going."

"Mr. Donald is not at all like a tutor, he is charming—perhaps all tutors are charming; he is the first I have known."

"Charming, well I don't know about that, that's going too far." The poor youth is terribly thick-skinned; he does not see I am vexed; he is only jealous at hearing any one else praised; he wants a good deal to make him that. "You see these fellows that have to earn their bread are obliged to stick so close to work and cram so awfully that they have no time for the pursuits of gentlemen."

"You mean that study and reading are not gentlemanlike pursuits."

I feel I am holding my head very stiffly as I say this.

Frank looks eagerly at once. I wonder he

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does not turn parson, he has such a knack of preaching.

"Well, I think both in men and women they are fitter pursuits for the middle class than for us. Of course, education don't matter for servants and laborers, but I quite agree with it for middle-class people who have to make their way in the world; but what's the use of classical knowledge to an army man, or to any one who has to live on his property?"

I had never learned Latin, but I had picked up bits and scraps from my governess, and it was fun to frighten Frank.

"Dear me, I should have thought a knowledge of Virgil very essential in a country-life."

He looked crestfallen at once.

"Well, then, I have not got it. So, I suppose you consider Donald ought to be master of Merdon instead of me. Well, I wish—yes, I just wish you would talk to the Traceys, and hear what they say."

I hear Captain Brand close behind us.

"If the Traceys do not like Mr. Donald, I shall not like them."

I do want so to affront Frank and make him go off in a huff, so that I may be able to get a few words with Captain Brand, to caution him not to tell Madame La Peyre. But I may as well expect that big moss-grown rock, twenty feet high at least, which sits there on the side of the wooded hill, to come toppling down on our heads.

The foolish fellow thinks he is doing me a service by interfering with my guardian. He must say "Good-by" when we reach home, that is my comfort.

Vain hope! When we come in sight of the cottage, Madame La Peyre is standing at the garden-gate, looking strangely perplexed and anxious.

She claps her hands when she sees us.

"Ma foi, Gertrude, but I have been tormented in a manner." Here she holds up both her pretty delicate hands, and then, as I run up to her, she kisses me on the forehead, after she has first courtesied to Captain Brand. I suppose Mr. Newton thought he was not wanted, for, when I looked back, he was gone.

"My child," says madame, earnestly, "I thought thou hadst fallen down the rocks again, and I was looking for some one to send in search of thee."

CHAPTER XX.

DISCLOSURE OF THE MARRIAGE.

I got up next morning in a very discontented state. The lovely sunset had left behind it lowering clouds—they sat on Dartmoor, brooding in such immovable gray heaviness, that I felt restless, and I think cross.

I had tried the whole evening to get a word alone with Captain Brand, but Madame La Peyre had not given me a chance; she even hurried me off to bed early, saying I must be tired after my long walk.

I stood peering out. Just as I turned from those sulky-looking clouds on Dartmoor, I perceived, but got no comfort from the prospect, in the waste bit (neither garden nor yard, but a sort of fusion of both) which is beneath my window, Madame La Peyre in earnest talk with Captain Brand.

I drew back from the window instantly, and again I felt a strong inclination to run away. I forgot to say that Captain Brand left a packet for me when he was here last, and when I opened it there were twenty-five sovereigns, and a memorandum saying that this was all the property left by my mother.

I kept five pounds for myself, and gave the rest to Madame La Peyre to take care of; and now how I wished I had kept all!

I felt sure that madame would side with Captain Brand, and look on him as my husband; for I saw last night how much she liked him.

I walked up and down my room restlessly. At last I rang the bell.

"Angélique, my head aches, and I don't want to go down to breakfast. Will you bring me a cup of coffee and some bread?"

Angélique stood and contemplated me for an instant, and then, to my relief, she said:

"Bien, mademoiselle," and went away.

How wise she is! Is it because she is a Frenchwoman? An ordinary English nurse in her position would not have studied my face as Angélique did just now. She would have said:

"O Miss Gertrude, how can you take such fancies? Go down to breakfast, do, like a dear young lady, it will do you good." And I should infallibly have told her to mind her own business.

I felt that I could not face Captain Brand and Madame La Peyre together just after this

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revelation. Something in the earnest way in which he bent his head down, and in her intent listening, told me what they were talking of.

Angélique soon brought the coffee, daintily arranged on a little tray. As I walked up and down I grew quieter—the coffee seemed to clear my brains. It was natural that Captain Brand should tell Madame La Peyre, and I no longer felt so sure that she would side entirely against me. She knew that which Captain Brand did not know—my love for Eugène. I fancied that it was to distract me from this that she had encouraged Mr. Newton's visits, for she was always cordial to him. She was as kind to Mr. Donald, but she treated him as if he were so very much older.

It came to me, with a pang of remorse, that I had not been to the post-office yesterday to see if there were a letter from Eugène. I had already inquired twice, and the sly look in old Samuel's eyes had vexed me and brought the color to my cheeks.

I looked out of the window. The waste bit was deserted; a Cochin-China hen, followed by four pullets, stalked awkwardly across it, looking like raw recruits trying to fancy themselves soldiers; and a barking told me that Bijou, madame's poodle, saw them, too, from the post which he always took up at breakfast-time in the sitting-room window. Yes, they were safe at breakfast, and I should go off for my letter, and if I found it I should start at once on a long walk, and get rid of Captain Brand and any explanation till dinner-time.

He had told me yesterday evening he could only stay a few days, and that then he was going away, perhaps for more than a year; thus it seems to me that the best way is to be quite civil and friendly, and then, when I get my father's letter, to write and tell Captain Brand that I cannot regard myself his wife, that I can never love him, and that I am engaged to Eugène—for I consider myself as much bound as if I had promised to be Eugène's wife, and I feel surer and surer that my father will take my part. And yet, while I put on my hat, there steals over me a dim and mysterious dread—a something I cannot grasp or define into any shape—as impalpable as the melancholy mist which forever hovers on that grand, sad Dartmoor. I try and shape it into distinctness: the only approach to form is a shrinking from Eugène's letter, and yet an ever-increasing desire for it.

I look at myself in the little old-fashioned mirror with level sides, which hangs in such a light that there is not a chance of seeing how one really appears in it. I make out that I am horribly pale, except my lips, which are intensely red, and my eyes, which are very dark and mournful. I start back; something, I cannot tell what, in my own face, reminds me so much of Mrs. Dayrell. I laugh, and in an instant the weird, strained look is gone.

"What nonsense! it is this quiet place, where there is nothing to think about but one's self, that has made me so fanciful."

I ran down-stairs very fast, and then off to the post-office. When one is puzzled with thoughts one does not choose to unravel, I mean reproving thoughts, I find a good run an excellent way of getting rid of them; and lately my conscience has been very reproachful, but I shall grow morbid if I listen to it.

I was out of breath when I reached the office; an old woman was standing below the window. I did not much care to be seen outside asking for letters, so I went round and tapped at the open door of Samuel's office.

"Come in," he said, but he never turned his head; he went on talking to Mrs. Treleaven. I knew her very well. She kept the "all" shop of the village, just beneath one of the tall elm-trees opposite the church. I peeped from behind the shutter of the window-curtain, and saw her hard face and obstinate gray eyes turned fixedly on Samuel. She put her hand behind her right ear.

"I don't hear all as yeu's bin saying, but it seems a morsel hard, Muster Morgan, as ye should find faut with papists—you as goes and listens to a man in a white rag every Sabbath!" here she gave a deep sigh.

I could see Samuel's profile; he bent his head suddenly, and crossed his hands meekly in front of him.

"My good womap, you should not judge; leave that to men. I gave chapel a fair turn, and now I give the church the same. Every thing must have its turn as is lawful, but papists ain't; them are blasphemous heathens."

I saw Mrs. Treleaven nod approval—her voice was slightly sharpened when she spoke.

"You're right for once, heathen's the

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word to fit that tall, solemn-dressed Madam Angelick, as they calls she; and she for to ask how much would satisfy me for my blue junket-bowls!"

"I don't see harm in that; thay's not much account to ye." Samuel spoke mischievously.

"For why?" Mrs. Treleaven threw back her head with emphasis.

"Ye always keeps 'em locked up out of sight; now, if Madame Angelick had 'em, she'd maybe stick 'em up, and make a show of 'em."

"I locks 'em up and to keep 'em from dust, and her would turn 'em into dust-traps; is that yer meaning?"

"If you choose to have it so. But I was thinkin', too, that here was a chance of turning a few shillings as don't come every day, and no soul the wiser."

I peeped again. Mrs. Treleaven's face had grown to look rigid, as if carved in wood.

"No soul the wiser! What o' that, Samuel Morgan? Them junket-bowls comed down to me from my great-grandmother, and how long her had 'em is more than can be told. My grandchildren may sell 'em when I'm dead and gone, and have no power to stop such courses: but, as they come to me, so I leaves 'em. Some day, maybe, I'll have a fine parlor, too, and put 'em out to be looked at, as well as another. What for not, Samuel Morgan?"

Samuel folded his hands softly; her voice was full of wrath.

"I never said contrairy, Mrs. Treleaven. There's one sure thing," he turned suddenly to me; "there ain't a morsel o' use in trying to give counsel to a woman, unless you do it vice varsy. Now, if I had ha' said, 'Don'tee sell the plates,' it's morally possible she might ha' gone and sold they—morally."

"Is there a letter for Miss Stewart?"

I had been feeling so glad that Samuel was sitting facing the window; but he wheeled his stool round in an instant, and looked at me.

"There have been a letter, ma'am—a foreign letter—with a name of that sort, these three days; and I was thinkin' it oodn't be claimed, so—"

"Give it me directly," I said; my face felt in a glow, but I could not help speaking impatiently. I wanted to make the prosy old man give me my treasure.

He half shut his eyes and smiled, and then he got up slowly, and went to a drawer below his desk, and slowly produced it.

At last I held it, the thin, slippery, precious letter; but I did not look glad when I got it. I had had time to stiffen my face before Samuel turned round.

"Good-morning."

I went away before he could speak. Men, as a rule, I find, take much longer in getting their words ready than women do.

What a happiness that I had put the letter in my pocket! While I stood by the dried-up pump, hesitating which road to take, I saw Angélique mounting the slope from the brook. I pretended not to see her, and turned toward the road which led to the Cleeve.

"Mademoiselle!"

I did not think Angélique could call so loud.

"Wait, if you please, one little moment."

Just then I longed to be a man, that I might say, "Confound your little moments!"

Instead, I said, when she stood beside me, breathless with her hasty climb, "It must be a very little one; I am off for a walk."

I spoke almost rudely; I was glowing with impatience to read my letter.

There is something in Angélique which soothes impatience. She does not look the least bit goody or reproving—that would have set all the remains of my patience fairly alight; but she smiles in her sweet, serene way, and says:

"Ah, mademoiselle, it is not I who want you, it is madame. She sends you her love, and will you come to her as quickly as you can?"

I think for a moment.

"Have you been looking for me long, Angélique?"

"For a quarter of an hour, perhaps, and madame has been in her room waiting, for I did not know that mademoiselle had gone out."

I felt a little conscious, for I had gone out very quietly to avoid notice. I sighed—of course I could not keep madame waiting any longer.

"Allons—in her room, is she? She will not keep me long, I dare say?"

I stole a swift glance at Angélique; she looked so unusually sad, that I suspected she too had been told my story.

I felt dogged and determined as I went slowly up to madame's bedchamber.

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There was a projecting window, and in the recess it made were set a small square writing-table and two basket-work easy-chairs —at least they were meant to be easy; they always seemed to me too slippery to sit on. Madame La Peyre was seated in one of these chairs, and as soon as I had kissed her she pointed to the other. I had meant to stand, so as to shorten the interview; but something in Madame La Peyre's face controlled me into submission. I did not feel subdued; I was more intensely rebellious against this hateful marriage than I had ever been—more resolute that I would die sooner than be really Captain Brand's wife. But there was a seriousness in madame's face that was new to me, and that oppressed me with a dread of coming evil. The foreboding of the morning came back and sat heavily on my heart, brooding there with nerveless wings, like a bat in daylight.

"Gertrude, my dear child"—this was a very formal beginning for madame—"Captain Brand has told me the relation in which he stands to you."

It was a pity she stopped; before I had time to pull my impetuosity up short, it tugged at the rein and got free.

"What is that?" I said, flippantly, with a hot face and eyes that I felt were flashing.

Madame La Peyre looked at me hastily, and then her dear old cheeks puckered into a decided attempt to cry; but she spoke again after a little waiting.

"You know what I mean, my child—that at your mother's wish you were married to Captain Brand." She held up her hand to check me this time. "I wish you had told me all at once, Gertrude, I should have acted differently; but I suppose"—she smiled in her usual sunny way—"you were shy about it. Well, you have an excellent husband—the most indulgent and considerate man possible; he makes me smile with his consideration. I tell him he does not understand young girls."

"How does he show this consideration, madame?" I could not even try to be reasonable; it seemed to me absolutely wicked that my own friend, to whom I had shown so much affection, should take Captain Brand's side against me.

She looked at me in a very surprised way.

"Why, my dear child, he leaves you free and uncontrolled; there are men who would think a few months' waiting quite sufficient."

I felt myself turn icy cold. I suppose I grew white. In a moment Madame La Peyre jumped up and put both arms round me.

"Ah ciel! my angel; but I had no thought of this. What is it, my Gertrude, my well-beloved?"

She rested my head on her shoulder and kissed me on both cheeks.

At this I began to cry heartily. My anger and fear melted away together.

"I don't mean," I sobbed, "that Captain Brand is not kind, but he is not my husband; I must love my husband, and I never—never—can—love—him."

"Yes, yes, *ma petite*, when he is your husband you will love him; it is quite right there is no occasion for that now; he does not now ask for your love, he does not even require that you should be called by his name."

I raised my head from her shoulder, and sat upright. If I did not protest then, it seemed to me, I was acknowledging myself married.

"Madame, will you please listen, and let me say all I want?" I gave a gasp, which frightened her, for she went and got her salts-bottle, and held it for me to smell at. "You know how young I am; I was much younger, much more like a child, before that night on board the Adelaide; I have never been the same since. My darling mother thought she was dying, and I thought so too; but indeed I gave her no consent; I was so stunned with surprise and grief that I said what I was told to say—it all seemed a dream—and then, just at the end, I thought my mother died, and I have never been able to remember what happened."

"My poor darling!"—her eyes were so full that she put her handkerchief to them—"it was too sudden, and you were too young, and then there was so much sadness afterward; if it had all come to pass quietly and naturally, you would have been contented."

I looked up to see if she could be in earnest; did she know nothing, then, of love? Had her soul been always kept free from the sweet, sad trouble which I knew to be woman's lawful portion.

Perhaps it had been feeling instead of knowledge, till I read Mr. Donald's poetry-books, but I thought that, however sad it

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"I SOMETIMES HATE CAPTAIN BRAND."

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might be, it was *life*; mere existence without it leveled one to a butterfly, or a bird; I started as the thought came—had not Mrs. Dayrell said that Madame La Peyre's nature was different from mine?

I shook my head.

"I can only say the same thing, madame. I must love my husband before I marry him, and I can never love Captain Brand. I think love is a free feeling; it could never be an act of duty. That marriage was not with my free consent. You think I am wicked, perhaps, but that marriage makes me sometimes hate Captain Brand."

I jumped up and clinched my hands nervously; madame looked shocked, so shocked that she did not answer; she left me, and sat down in the chair opposite mine.

"My child, you indeed shock me. I do not think"—she spoke very coldly—"that Captain Brand knows how much you dislike this marriage."

"He knows I do not like him."

"He said you seemed to avoid him—seemed restrained with him; but I told him that this was quite right and proper for a young girl; and, my dear"—Madame La Peyre looked more decorous than I could have imagined possible—"I believe this conversation is unnecessary. Captain Brand is your husband, but he will not claim you as his wife for more than a year; all we have to think of is so to complete your education that you may be fit for your new position when the time comes."

Her unsympathetic manner saved me; I had been on the point of confessing my love to Eugène—our correspondence—my certainty that my father would refuse his consent to the marriage with Captain Brand—all the plans and hopes which had become fixed resolutions since I reached Merdon.

But that look of propriety warned me; instead of growing excited with the rush of impetuous feeling which a loving look or word would have created, I kept calm, and, being calm, could think.

How much wiser it was to keep quiet now, and then when my father's letters came in support of my assertion, and when Captain Brand was safe at the other side of the world, I could tell Madame La Peyre frankly that I consider my marriage was no marriage, and that I never would be the wife of any one unless I could be parted from Captain Brand!

My silence puzzled her; she leaned forward and put one hand gently on my cold fingers—I suppose the touch gave her a truer insight.

"We will not talk of this again, darling," she said, soothingly; "there is no need for either of us to remember it."

She smiled as sweetly, as brightly, as ever. I kissed her, and then I went to my own room.

"No need to remember!"

I looked at myself in the old mirror; how wan and drawn-in my face was, and there were dark rings under my eyes! The shadow of the morning was no shadow now, it was a living sorrow stamped into my heart.

"No need to remember!" I sighed.

I must bear all my burden alone; there was no use in even trying to make good, kind, merry Madame La Peyre understand me.

CHAPTER XXI.

A TÊTE-À-TÊTE WITH THE CAPTAIN.

I do not know how long I had been sitting on the bank beyond the huge stepping-stones at the bottom of the Cleeve. Dark-gray masses piled one on another, leaving black, unfilled spaces in which the boiling water sometimes churned and foamed into snowy violence, and then hurried headlong to encounter fresh obstacles, and roar its way down the tree-shaded valley, or more awful-looking yet when the water lay in still pools, terrible from the depths their darkness told of—the stepping-stones were wet and slippery—a single false step, and I might plunge into one of these pools and be sucked under the stones forever, with no mourners except the huge overhanging trees that made the place gloomy; and yet, though it was all new and strange to me, I felt no fear. I had heard of the stepping-stones as the wildest bit in the Cleeve, and I felt pleased that I had come upon it unawares. I stepped across to the gloomy, deeply-shadowed bank on the farther side, thinking only of my letter. Actually, the dangerous spot was delightful to me as a safe place in which I could read Eugène's letter without fear of interruption. He was my entire world now, and all else was subservient.

I read my letter twice. I did not quite understand it, and yet I felt how delicious it

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was! I did not know really that I was pretty till Eugène told me so—so often! He says, in the letter, that my eyes are like stars, and swimming with love. The words thrill through me; I feel faint and trembling as I sit there on the bank. Eugène loves me so very dearly; the letter is full of his feelings, and how dull he finds his studies, and how he longs to be free, that he may come to England and be with me—there is a great deal that seems to me very beautiful about the world and its trammels, and how true love may be known from false by its scorn for all observances and restraints that fetter feeling.

My face has grown hot while I have been reading. I wonder what Madame La Peyre would think of Eugène's letter? She would doubtless say that he ought not write to me at all, but, then, Madame La Peyre considers that Captain Brand is my husband; so, of course, it is impossible we can judge in the same way. I consider that I am quite free, and I am determined that nothing shall ever make me love any one except Eugène.

Dear Eugène, how I love you! Just as I was going to kiss the letter, a slight sound startles me. I look across the torrent. Captain Brand is on the other side of the stepping-stones, and he is looking at me.

I am vehemently thankful that the stones are between us, and that they are so dangerous. Even Captain Brand dares not cross them quickly. I put the letter in my pocket without any haste or confusion—as coolly as if it were my handkerchief. I feel that my face is very red, and my heart is swinging like the pendulum of a clock; but I am more stunned than flurried. I feel as if this must cause a crisis in the dumb, smothered intercourse that goes on between me and Captain Brand. What will it lead to?

He is over more quickly than I thought it possible. I cannot look up at him. I have an idea that, when he is angry, he is very rough and coarse; and I do not want him to see the frightened look in my face.

He seats himself beside me—in that masterful way which always makes me shrink from him.

"Are you better?" he says, pleasantly. "Angélique said you were ill, and, when I went to ask you if you felt well enough to come out for a walk with me, I heard you had gone alone to the Cleeve."

I felt vexed. How did any one know which way I had gone? Do they watch me? In a sort of contradiction against Angélique and her mistress, I felt more tolerant toward Captain Brand.

"I am quite well, thank you." I smiled and ventured to look at him. Angry? I never saw him look so happy—his face was one kind smile.

A pang of remorse went through me—how unsuspecting he was, and how deceitful I am growing—for I feel by instinct that if I try to keep him happy and pleasant with me he will forget about the letter! The remorse must have shown itself in my face.

"You were reading a letter, were you not?" he said.

I would have given much to have been able to look at him, but I feared I might betray myself. I pretended not to hear, and bent down suddenly to one of the dark pools at our feet.

"Was that a fish? Look at it! Is it not awful to think of falling into one of those holes?"

"Yes," he spoke gravely; "it makes me feel nervous that you should have crossed them alone. I wish you would not do it again, my dear child. I can hardly tell you how unsafe they are."

Actually his voice trembled. I suppose it was the repulse I had met with in the morning from Madame La Peyre, but just then I longed to take Captain Brand's hand in mine, and ask him to release me, and be my friend instead of my husband; but the unconquerable fear I had of approaching the subject checked me.

"I did not think they were so dangerous till I sat here, and saw that awful depth—indeed, I will not cross them alone again."

I spoke very gently—humbly even, for I felt guilty. I began to see a little how unselfish Captain Brand was.

"Thank you, my dear, dear child!" He had taken my hand and was holding it between both of his. I looked up in sudden fear, and it made me sad to see his face change. He really was handsome a minute ago—his blue eyes shone with affection, but I suppose he must see how I shrink from him—all light and warmth faded—he looked hurt and disappointed.

But I felt miserable to have made him unhappy. I can never help trying to make people bright and happy. I forgot all my

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shyness, and I pressed his hand gently with mine.

"It is so very good of you to be so careful of me," I said, softly, and I looked as affectionate as I could.

Captain Brand gave a little exclamation. I could not hear distinctly what he said, but he actually clasped both my hands again tightly in his and kissed them—just as he did in the cabin of the Eclair.

I was so frightened I nearly fell off my seat. This is what makes it so difficult to get on with Captain Brand. He changes his manner so quickly! I am sorry to appear cold and indifferent to him. He must think I am hard and ungrateful; and yet directly I soften, or show him the least bit of friendship, he frightens me. He seems to have no self-control; and, at his age, it is absurd for a man to be impulsive.

I do not know how I looked; I felt horribly shy. But he seemed ashamed of his own behavior. He let my hands drop suddenly, and got up and went away from me farther down the bank.

I am very glad he has gone. After all, if I had not been kind to him, and made him forget every thing, he might have asked questions about that letter.

"O Eugène," I say to myself, "what a dear price I have paid for it! I feel disgraced. I have acted a falsehood, and now how much more deceit and contrivance shall I have to undergo before all is ended?"

But I cannot give up Eugène's letter. I did not know till I read this one how much delight a letter can give. Ah, how much!

I am not left alone long with my thoughts.

Captain Brand comes back, and sits down again, not so near me this time. I am very glad of this; I feel more at my ease, and calculate the distance between us; and I feel sure he cannot reach my hand from where he sits. It seemed to me to be a kind of treason to Eugène to let any one kiss my hand, and it is impossible that Captain Brand can care much to kiss it; I suppose he does it to be fatherly and affectionate; he will probably kiss Madame La Peyre's hand when he goes away.

"Gertrude"—I quite start; I never can get reconciled to hearing him call me so—"I want to tell you my plans, if you will kindly listen."

I look profoundly dutiful, but I move a little farther off.

Captain Brand shades his face with one of his large brown hands.

"I am going to America after I leave you. If possible, I shall run down and take a look at you when I return, and then I hope to sail again."

"When shall you come back?"

I really only ask for the sake of saying something, and because it is polite to seem a little interested; but Captain Brand takes his hand away, and looks very much pleased.

"I shall be back from America soon after Christmas, though this is not quite certain; but, when I sail again, I shall probably be away a year or more."

I sighed with a feeling of intense relief. Before the end of that year some means will have been found to set me free.

"But you will write to me while I am in America," he says, as if it were settled, not as if he were asking a favor; but I must be as honest as I can; I feel less shy of him now.

"Oh, please don't ask me to write! You cannot think how I dislike it. Madame La Peyre will write, and I will send you a message in the letter. Won't that do?"

I look up in a laughing, coaxing way; but he is quite grave, and I see his mouth twitch.

"Well"—he waits a little before he speaks—"we will not argue about it: I will write to you, and trust that you will change your mind, and be kind enough to answer my letter. You may be sure that every thing—every little thing—relating to you interests me. I fear you do not think so—but it is the simple truth. You can tell me about your daily life—about your walks. I am afraid there is not much else to amuse you here."

"Oh, yes, indeed, I like Merdon; and I have some friends—"

Captain Brand immediately looks grave, and he gets up.

"Shall I help you across the stepping-stones?" he says, and he holds out his hand. This is, I suppose, an intimation that our conference is over. I do not think he really cares about me, or he would stay longer when he comes, and he would care more to talk to me alone. But I am very glad, not because I actually dislike talking to him; I believe I like the excitement it gives me, and there is something dignified about him which

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I can't help admiring, even when I am most angry; but all the time I am with him, I am tormented by a dreadful shrinking fear that he is going to speak of the marriage.

We are safe over the stepping-stones, and I go on in front with a reprieved feeling at my heart. I scramble after ferns and mosses; and, to my joy, Captain Brand does not try to overtake me, except once, when I climb a steep bit of rock, then I find him beside me in an instant, helping me as carefully as if I were a child.

"Thank you." I looked up in his face and laughed. "You don't seem to have much opinion of my climbing powers; but I must learn; I shall not have you to help me always."

I am sure I heard him sigh; and yet it is certain he does not seem to care about being much with me. I cannot understand him.

"Why does not Madame La Peyre's maid take walks with you?" he said; "it is unsafe for you to go scrambling about in this wild place alone. Suppose you fell and sprained your ankle. You might lie suffering for hours perhaps before any help came. I shall speak to Madame La Peyre about it."

"Merci!" I made a deep courtesy; "then you really think I am still a child, and still want a nurse-maid. Why, poor dear Angélique would infallibly break *her* legs if she came down among the rocks here, and then how should I get her home? If I really want a companion, I will find something younger and more amusing than Angélique, thank you."

How foolish I am to tease and to provoke him! I am so frightened at my own daring that I dart off, and never stop till I have reached the top of the ridge.

To my joy a party of people come straggling up the rocky field, tourists from Torquay or Exeter, who are seeing Merdon and its neighborhood; but they linger so long about the field that I feel they are an answer to Captain Brand's fears. No one could call the Cleeve solitary to-day.

CHAPTER XXII.

"MY LOVE SHE'S BUT A LASSIE YET."

I was quite out of breath by the time I reached the farm-house. I walked fast on purpose; but not to avoid Captain Brand. I begin to like him; he is so different from every one else, and I cannot make him out—a reserved man is much more interesting than a man who talks constantly about himself, as Frank Newton does. I have walked on so fast, because I wanted to see if Captain Brand would not overtake me, and he has not tried to do it; he has even let me open the gates for myself. He is the strangest, most difficult man to understand that ever lived. For just that instant, while he held my hands—I blush while I think of it—I almost feared he was in love with me; but this is impossible. He is to go away very early to-morrow, and he may not come back for several months. If he were ever so little in love with me, he would have been eager not to lose a minute's chance of talking to me alone. If Eugène had had the opportunity of walking alone with me through that delicious lane and the wood, he would have been greedy of every minute. Dearest Eugène! I take his letter out of my pocket and kiss it.

I sit down on my bed and rest.

I am a little surprised at myself. I have this letter—far more delightful than I had thought a letter could have been—and yet I am thinking again of Captain Brand. In my heart, though I pretend not to be, I am a little disappointed that he is so indifferent.

I feel vexed with myself, and I read Eugène's letter again. Dear fellow! how fond he is of me, and how well he knows that every little thing about him interests me! I could sit here reading his letter all day, but I must go down out of politeness, for I suppose Captain Brand is my visitor, not Madame La Peyre's.

I find them sitting in the window-seat, talking so earnestly that they give a little start as I come in.

Something in Captain Brand's pleasant smile is reassuring. I have always wished so much for a brother, and I think he looks very brotherly just now.

"What are you two plotting?" I say, saucily, and I pinch Madame La Peyre's soft white hand; for the moment I entirely forget her lecture; I believe Eugène's letter has made me too happy to remember any thing unpleasant.

"We are not plotting, Gertrude." Madame La Peyre can always be easy and graceful in an instant. "Your kind friend"—

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she smiled at the captain—"was making all sorts of arrangements for your comfort—that is all."

I feel shy and uncomfortable; but, before I can get vexed, Captain Brand says:

"No, madame, that is not fair; I was only agreeing with your suggestions. I am such an ignorant guardian, and you are so kind in helping me to a knowledge of my duties."

There is a pleading expression in his eyes—at least I think so.

"You are an excellent guardian, and I am quite contented."

I look at him more frankly than I have done yet. I want him to know that I do like him as a friend, though I have been often so disagreeable.

Captain Brand has certainly a beautiful smile; his eyes and his lips smile at the same time.

"Then we are good friends," he laughs; and then he says with a sigh, "I wish I had a week to spare down here."

"Don't wish that," I say, mischievously; "I should quarrel with you at least six times a week."

He gets up and stands in front of me with such an admiring glance that I look away quickly, and I meet Madame La Peyre's eyes, full of wonder. This sobers me—takes me back in an instant to my misery in Madame La Peyre's bedroom. Captain Brand sees my sadness; but, instead of turning away and avoiding me, in his unaccountable way he speaks like a kind elder brother who wants to comfort.

"I should like to hear you sing before I go; shall I open the piano?"

What has come to Captain Brand, and what has come to me? He speaks to me as if he were my equal, and I do not resent it. I give him quite a grateful look as I pass on my way to the piano. I do not at all understand myself now.

"Sing—what shall I sing? I have only Mrs. Dayrell's music to choose from."

"Is that all? You must have music of your own. You have only to write to one of the London music-shops, and they will send you any thing; or, if you send to Exeter, they will manage it for you; or, will you give me a list, and I will see about it to-morrow?"

"Oh, no, thank you; I will write myself."

I flushed at the idea of accepting any gift from Captain Brand. I like him this evening better than I have ever done, and I consider him my friend; but I cannot put myself under any obligation to him.

I turn the leaves of a music-book carelessly. It is full of old songs. Captain Brand looks over my shoulder.

"Will you sing this one?"

He lays his brown hand on a page. It is "My Love She's but a Lassie yet." I feel myself crimson in an instant, but I will not smile. I suppose Captain Brand wants to tease me for my bad behavior in France. But he shall not think I understand him in the least.

"Yes," I answer, without even a smile; and I sing the song very quietly, without any of the sauciness I long to put into the words.

Captain Brand does not even thank me; he moves back to the window, and looks out.

"Gertrude has a charming voice," madame says.

"Yes;" and then I hear a distinct sigh. What was there in my singing to make this unaccountable man sigh? What a sphinx he is!

But Angélique comes with dinner, and the evening goes so fast that bedtime seems to arrive directly.

"I will say 'Good-by' to-night," Captain Brand says.

I am going to say, "Oh, no; I shall get up and see you off." But I look up; and, somehow, I feel shy. If he wanted to see me again he would ask me to get up to-morrow. He holds my hand, and looks so kind that I long to be alone with him. For I think I should be able to confess about Eugène and the letter, and get rid of all this hateful deceit.

Madame is surely a witch.

"You have, perhaps, some words to say to Gertrude, Monsieur le Capitaine." She gets up to go away.

Captain Brand goes after her quickly.

"No, indeed, madame. I have only to ask her to write to me; at least to be good enough to answer my letters." Then he turns to me: "And now, good-by, my child; God bless you!"

He took my hands in both his, but he only pressed them gently, and I gave him a hearty grasp in return.

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"Good-by; I am sorry you are going."

As soon as I reached my room, I shut fast the door of communication into Madame La Peyre's. When I do this, Angélique understands that I do not want her. I feel so excited with my own thoughts that I must be alone.

I am excited, and I am only angry with myself. Oh, why, when Madame La Peyre gave me this chance, did I not ask to speak to Captain Brand alone, and tell him the truth? I did try to speak; but that strange shyness which I never felt with any one but Captain Brand, held me back. It must be the remembrance of the marriage that causes this shyness. But I will conquer it; I will get up to-morrow morning and tell him every thing.

CHAPTER XXIII.

VISITORS.

I OVERSLEPT myself. I had meant to wake at five o'clock; but it was six when I peeped out of the window, roused by the barking of the dogs. I knew that their barking was caused by Captain Brand's departure, as he was to start at six o'clock.

By the time I am ready to go down-stairs I have decided that it was a good thing I have overslept myself.

It is much better to wait the arrival of my father's letter; when that comes I will write to Captain Brand, and tell him every thing. He is so really good and kind, that he will not blight the happiness of two young things who love one another as Eugène and I do. I begin to like him so much; and yet, if he insisted on making me his wife, I should hate him. Surely, any sensible man would listen to a girl who told him this, especially if she told him she loved some one else.

I was very silent during breakfast, and so was Madame La Peyre.

Just as she left the room, she said:

"You can go and see Madame Dayrell when you please, Gertrude; but do not go often. I told you I wished you not to go during Captain Brand's visit; and it will be better, my dear, not to speak of your marriage to her."

Madame La Peyre went away so quickly that I could not answer; but, indeed, I had no words ready.

That word "marriage," spoken by Madame La Peyre, made my trouble real again, and destroyed the web of hope I had been weaving.

I sat, wearily picturing my future life. I would never be Captain Brand's wife. No, not if I had to run away, and spend all my days in efforts to escape him; and then—why, I do not know—all my misery seemed to roll away like a cloud; perhaps it was that the sun was shining gloriously, making the satin holly-leaves look like little mirrors of brightness.

"I will not think of it any more"—and I went up to my room to get my hat—"I will think of my father; and, also, I am sure Captain Brand will be glad to break an engagement with a girl who does not love him, and whom he does not love; and, if I keep this marriage out of my head, I am really happy here with dear Madame La Peyre, much happier than I was at home, when I was always craving for love, and sympathy, and escape from that ugly old school-room. I remember, even in those days which seem so far off now, that I certainly was not contented; I wanted to know more of my mother, to talk to her, and to ask her about thoughts which I could not tell to my governess or sisters. Till her illness began on board the Adelaide, I always felt strange with her. Ah, if I only had her now! When I think of her, it seems to me I have rather an idea of what she might have been than a real memory of her. O mother darling, if ever I am blessed with a child, no nurse or governess shall ever come between me and my child's confidence; it shall never puzzle over the mysteries of life as I have puzzled."

Here I smile at my own exaggeration. With the exception of that trouble which I have resolved to put out of my thoughts, and the great sorrow I have at times for my mother, life seems to me here, at Merdon, much brighter and pleasanter than I had imagined it. I have friends who are kind to me; and there are sweet, bright Madame La Peyre, and Angélique, who is always sweet and kind, so good that only to talk to her makes me feel better. Every one loves me; even the village children flock round me if I appear in the village in play-hours. Old Samuel is cross-grained, but then his quaintness amuses me; he is like a gnarled oak-stump. Mrs. Dayrell is different. Ah, Mrs. Dayrell

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makes the chief shadow in my life! I cannot love her. I do not often see her, but she always fascinates me; and then, when I am deeply interested, and am pitying her with my whole heart, she stings like a nettle. She is so out of harmony with all else here that my visits are painful to look back on. I will make Angélique tell me why Mrs. Dayrell is so unhappy, whether she has a real trouble, or whether she makes one for herself.

There is a knock at the door of my room; my reflections are ended.

Angélique comes in, smiling.

"Mademoiselle, there are some visitors for you. Madame Tracey and her daughters are returned from their voyage, and they come to make the acquaintance of Mademoiselle Stewart."

I smiled. I have heard that the vicar's family have been spending the autumn in Switzerland, which, to me, seems a puny voyage enough; but I am pleased with the hope of getting young companions.

I found them all in the "parlor," as the mistress of the house calls it, with Madame La Peyre. Mrs. Tracey came forward and shook hands with me. I like her face, but not her manner. She is a small woman, with a delicate skin, and regular features, and blue eyes. They are pretty, without being sweet. She reminds me of that little garden-flower, nemophila, fair to the eye, but wholly without sentiment or fragrance. The girls are not like their mother; they are tall and large-boned—showy-looking, I suppose, they would be called. Georgiana, the eldest, has dark eyes, and heavy, dark eyebrows, and such black hair; but she looks haughty, she holds her head so stiffly. Angelina, or Lina, as they call the other, looks much nicer. She has soft eyes—I cannot tell of what color, her white eyelids droop so over them—and she has long, light eyelashes. Her light hair is wavy and pretty. She is not so pale as her sister is, and there is a pretty dimple in her cheeks, which makes me think she can be more amusing than she shows herself in this visit.

But I like both the girls better than I like their mother, because they do not make such professions of delight. How can Mrs. Tracey know all in a minute that she is charmed with me? She is pretty, but I am afraid she must be silly. Also, why need she say that she has often heard of my great-grandfather, Lord Erlingham? She has a great deal of graceful manner, but still I do not care for her. I am relieved when she says:

"Why should not these girls go for a little walk, while you and I chat about Switzerland, madame?"

I am off to get my hat before any one answers, and Lina, at any rate, looks pleased when I come down, ready to start. I feel a little shy of these young ladies as I walk between them, and remark the fashionable style of their hair. I suppose it is fashionable. I have gone on doing mine just the same way I did in Van Diemen's Land, nearly a year ago—only long, loose plaits, coiled round and round the back of my head. But this is quite different; it droops low in the neck, and makes the head look very wide. Their dress is quiet enough in color, but still it is studied, and there is a great deal of trimming about it, and on their gray hats.

The eldest looks at me as soon as we are in the path leading to the village.

"Do you not find Merdon dreadfully dull?" She speaks kindly, and I think pityingly, but I am not in a pugnacious mood this morning. I am disposed to rejoice in this prospect of companionship.

"No, not yet, it is all new to me. I have been so long on board ship and traveling, that I delight in the stillness, and all the country sights and sounds, it is so different from Tasmania."

"You will soon lose many of these," said Lina—she lisps, but it sounds very pretty. I am sure I shall like her—I would kiss her if she gave me the least excuse; "why, it is quite chilly already," she gives a little shiver, "and look how bare the trees are already. Merdon always seems extra melancholy to me with that ceaseless sound of falling leaves."

I laugh.

"I hardly notice it; you see the changing color on the trees has been to me something glorious. We have so few beautiful trees, and they do not take these delicate tints; but still, even when all the leaves are gone, nothing can alter the sunsets in the Cleeve, or the exquisite tints on the rocks there."

"I am afraid my sister and I are not artists," says Georgiana, coldly, and she gives a little emphasis, as if there were something objectionable in the word; "we shrink from dullness, and we find Merdon quite a buried-alive residence—there is so little society."

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I look at her; though she is so tall, we are nearly of a height. She is frowning hard with those heavy black eyebrows.

"But I should have thought you knew every one in the village, from old Samuel upward. You know Mr. Donald and Mr. Newton, of course?" I said this a little slyly, because Mr. Newton had talked to me about the Traceys, and had said they were spoiled. So I felt deceitful in putting this as a question.

I saw the sisters exchange looks, and then Georgiana smiled in a very pitying way indeed.

"We know Mr. Newton—he owns the land here, and he is a very charming person, a very old friend of ours; but Mr. Donald is not one of our friends, he is only Mr. Newton's tutor. You do not know that, perhaps?"

I look at her and I smile. With all her fashion and her grand manner, how small she is! Plainly to her a gentleman is made by his position, not by his behavior. I am sure Lina must be wiser, and I turn to her.

"Yes, Mr. Donald told me so himself; he has been so very kind to me—lending me books, and directing my reading."

They both seemed to think this amusing.

"Well," said Lina, "that would be quite in his way, I fancy—he looks just like a schoolmaster, though, when mamma proposed that he should give us German lessons, he refused to do so, without giving any reason. Very foolish and stuck up, was it not?"

"I do not find him so." I was vexed with myself for speaking warmly, but I could not help it. It was not so much what the Misses Tracey said, but the manner of saying it—as if Mr. Donald was some one of whom it was hardly seemly to talk at all. "I think him most interesting to talk to."

"Really!" Georgiana showed her white, firm teeth in a most elaborate smile; "I have never talked to Mr. Donald, so I cannot presume to judge. I fancy it is very difficult to judge people of that kind—one can never admit them to the familiarity necessary for easy intercourse. With people of his own class, I dare say Mr. Donald is a very good sort of person."

"I do not understand"—my eyes were very mocking, I fancy, for Lina said in haste:

"No, of course you do not understand, dear Miss Stewart. Georgiana is so terribly downright. Mamma often tells her so." This was said in a low voice, and it shocked me—it seemed to me household treason that Lina should speak of her sister's faults.

"Mr. Donald is a scholar, and has associated with gentlemen, and so on"—Lina had a half-conscious look in her eyes—"but he has no position, of course—he is received merely as Mr. Newton's tutor. Have you seen Mr. Newton's horses?" she went on, "they are such loves!"

"Yes, I am going to ride one of them next week; he has promised to lend me one."

I felt that they exchanged looks again—and Lina left off smiling.

"Do you see much of Mr. Newton?" Georgiana really speaks as if she thought me a child.

"Oh, yes, I see him most days," I say, carelessly, "I shall miss him when he goes."

"I don't know what we shall do without him," Lina sighs, "he is so clever, so remarkable in all ways—so very much thought of by every one."

My contradiction got the better of me.

"He is very good-natured and amusing, but I had no idea any one could consider him remarkable or clever. I fancy if he were not the owner of all this land, he would not be much thought of, he is so like anybody else."

Georgiana smiled.

"I see we shall not agree about people," she said, "but probably when you have been a little longer in England you will think as we do. I confess that I like a person to be like other people, and not to do any thing eccentric or original. Mamma always says this is bad tone; it does for geniuses and those kind of people who almost always rise from the ranks, and like to be conspicuous, and have to work for their bread; but I assure you any thing original or indifferent to society in general is considered ill-bred; in England one has to be guided so much by what other people do, and say, and think; it is the only safe rule."

"Yes"—Lina's sweet, lisping voice came like a faint echo—"I believe there is nothing gentlemen dislike so much as a girl who thinks for herself."

I could hardly help laughing.

"Well," I said, "I suppose there is the same safe rule everywhere; only unless there were sometimes these original people, I think the world would grow dull. Where shall we go for a walk? It is almost all new to me."

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They took me through the village, past the turning to the Cleeve, past some wooden cottages with broken steps leading up to the porches; over one of these porches a honeysuckle, still in blossom, straggled; the door was open, it led direct into the room, and I could not help looking in as we passed by. The open fireplace had a short, pink-checked curtain hanging from the mantel-shelf, and two benches on each side of the fireless hearth; but my eyes fastened on the window, which framed in an exquisite landscape of many-colored hills behind its row of scarlet geraniums and fuchsias.

"How fond your cottagers seem of flowers!" I said; "I see them everywhere."

"Yes"—Georgiana holds her head so very stiffly when she speaks—"but you only see common flowers down here; at Exeter, now, or in London, you see flowers really worth looking at—orchids and that kind of things."

"I love all flowers," I say, enthusiastically. We are past the cottages and beside the brook again which has threaded its way upward, or, I suppose, downward, and borders the side of the road hedged in by sedges; in and out of these, tiny, active fish are darting merrily, chasing one another, and sometimes leaping up in pursuit of some rash fly buzzing too thirstily near. Among the sedges a little blue flower has wreathed itself. I am just going to point out the exquisite contrast it makes among the tender green of the flags, but I remember Georgiana's admonitions, and point to the fish instead.

"I suppose they are good to eat?"

"Oh, yes, delicious; I wonder"—Lina speaks mischievously—"you have not had some sent you from the park; we get basketfuls from Mr. Newton."

But I am resolved not to disagree with my new companions any more; and very soon they are telling me all about Switzerland and their adventures; these last they evidently consider more interesting than any of the places they have visited; in fact, it appears to me that the number of fresh acquaintances made in the course of their tour is the chief point of interest in their journey.

We walk on, talking, till I find they have brought me home by a new way, which leads to our house without passing through the village again, still following the winding in-and-out curves of the brook.

"If you will wait for me," Georgiana says, "I have a message to leave here."

"Do you visit any of these cottages?" I asked Lina.

"Oh, yes; there are some dear old women here, and we teach in the school; perhaps you would like to teach, too?"

"No, thank you."

I felt shy, and awed, and ashamed; I began to think I had been harsh in thinking these girls silly; they knew more than I did if they knew how to talk to people in cottages, and teach school-children. "I am afraid I should only be shy with the first, and teach the last to get into mischief."

While we stood waiting, we saw Mrs. Tracey coming to meet us.

"I hope you have had a pleasant walk?"

Mrs. Tracey (though she has two grown-up daughters) is still a very pretty woman when she smiles, but I feel constrained by her manner; she is too courteous, too much pleased with me. I am afraid I am not amiable. I shall ask Angélique what she thinks of Mrs. Tracey. I respect Angélique's opinion because she never speaks ill of any one.

I said "Good-by" to my new friends, but I did not go in-doors at once; they had left me at the corner of the lane leading to the farm-house, and I stood there—I was thinking so much of our talk.

When I lived at home I used sometimes to hear it said that fashion and position are necessaries of life. I believe if Captain Brand had been in the navy, or accustomed to society, and moving among fashionable people, I should have tried to think of him as my husband. I mean, of course, before I saw Eugène; now, all that is over. I ask myself what has come to me. I receive Mr. Donald as an equal. I even look up to him, and think him much more cultivated than Frank Newton, and in this last visit I have not felt that Captain Brand is my inferior, I think of him as my friend. What has caused this? it is not Madame La Peyre, she is an old aristocrat, I can see. She, I am sure, prefers Mr. Newton to Mr. Donald. Is it that, since I have been tossed about in the world, I have coarsened? or is it this marriage which has made me less refined already?

My cheeks grow hot; I feel the tips of my ears burn; then actually I have felt contradictory with these girls, Georgiana and Lina, because they are more feminine, more

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really womanly than I am; and yet—no, conventionality is not, surely, real propriety; it cannot be right to look down on such a man as Mr. Donald, or to think of him as an inferior. Oh, what a puzzle life is, and whom have I to guide me? No one I can lean on or trust.

I look toward the house.

Angélique is standing in the yard with a troop of half-grown chickens round her feet. Near her head, almost as if they meant to flutter on her shoulder, some white pigeons flit about. I have noticed, before this, how all the mute creatures, as well as the little children, love Angélique; perhaps her look of serene content wins them. I have never seen her laugh, but she almost always smiles. She looks most serious, I fancy, as she passes the door of Mrs. Dayrell's room, then a shadow falls across the calm sweetness of her face, and yet I think Angélique likes the poor, haughty woman. I suppose I must go and see Mrs. Dayrell, now Captain Brand has gone.

CHAPTER XXIV.

ANGÉLIQUE LECTURES ME.

More than two months since Captain Brand went away! I have not heard again from Eugène, and I begin to weary of his silence. Christmas will be here soon, and it is very cold. Madame La Peyre shivers and stays by the fireside, but I rejoice in the frost. It has been very dull lately, for the Traceys have been paying country-visits, and Mr. Newton and Mr. Donald have been away ever so long. I have taken some pleasant walks with Angélique, for Madame La Peyre proposed this arrangement after her talk with Captain Brand. At first I thought this absurd, but I have grown fond of listening to Angélique's stories. She tells me old Norman legends. I am quite anxious to go back to Château-Fontaine, and explore the neighborhood with her. I shall see every thing with new eyes. There is a wonderful ruined monastery, not far off, and all along the Seine, she says, there are wonderful places; but I do not know when we shall get back to the château. Mrs. Dayrell has been very ill lately. I rarely see her, and when I do she cannot hold a conversation, because of her cough. She looks more weird and hectic than ever, and if she speaks she is always bitter and contradictory.

I was thinking much about her as Angélique and I walked briskly along the high-road; even I, with all my love of climbing, shrank from the rocks in the Cleeve since this hard frost had set in. On the left the wind came whistling through an ash-wood, and the bare branches groaned and rattled as if they felt the cold, and the need of shelter from it. A robin sat perched on a blackberry-bush that had straggled to the top of the hedge; the little bright-eyed bird was singing heartily; on the right the fields sloped down to the frozen brook that lay silent and imprisoned at the foot of the steep hills rising from its opposite bank.

"Angélique"—I spoke so suddenly out of the midst of my reverie that she started, "why is Mrs. Dayrell always impatient and unhappy?"

Angélique's smile faded; I think she was really pained to hear me call any one impatient.

"Mademoiselle is not pitiful this morning; the poor madame scarcely ever sleeps; I hear her cough—cough—cough—all through the night; and, mademoiselle, the dark hours are so much longer than the light hours to persons who suffer."

"But, Angélique, if you hear madame cough all through the night, you must lie awake, too, and you are not cross."

"Ah, mademoiselle, but it is different to lie awake and think of the suffering of another, and to suffer one's self; one is not fevered and distracted, and one has one's mind tranquil. Ah, mademoiselle, I pray that it may not be laid on you to suffer as madame suffers."

It is very rare for Angélique to preach, and I make a point of teasing her if she does.

"I want to know why you always connect me with Mrs. Dayrell; what likeness can there be between us?"

"Because I see a likeness, mademoiselle." Angélique spoke with unusual quickness. "I knew madame when she was as young as mademoiselle is." She gave a deep sigh. "She used to be so gay, so beautiful—" She sighed again.

"What changed her?" I said, abruptly, and then I felt as if I were inquisitive.

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"I FOUND ANGÉLIQUE FEEDING HER CHICKENS."

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Angélique looked puzzled; either she did not know, or else she was unwilling to answer my question.

"It is a very sad history, mademoiselle," she said, at last. "I should not like to tell it till I have asked madame's permission."

I felt disappointed; for I guessed that Madame La Peyre would refuse permission, as she always tries to put hindrances between me and Mrs. Dayrell.

I looked at Angélique, and I saw her eyes bent eagerly forward, and at the same instant I heard the sound of a fast-trotting horse.

You might walk for days about Merdon, and never meet so much as a wayfarer in the wooded roads which screen you completely from view of the fields, and since all my friends departed this isolation has been complete, so that this fast trot-trot gave me a sort of Robinson Crusoe sensation.

I had not long to wait. The road wound in and out in such sudden turns that our first sight of the horseman was when he was close beside us.

It was Mr. Donald.

He was off his horse instantly, and he turned to walk beside me, holding the bridle in his hand. I was very glad to see him, but he looked delighted. I thought he was quite foolish to show his feeling so plainly, and yet I liked him to be glad.

"How is Mr. Newton—is he with you?"

He was grave in an instant.

"He started long before I did—he must have reached the park some hours ago. We have ridden over from Exeter."

And then he walked on in silence.

What can have come to him—he used to have so much more conversation than Mr. Newton had? Angélique dropped a few steps behind, but she was still near enough to hear all we said.

"I think we had better turn back," I said; "if you have ridden from Exeter, your horse must be tired."

"Yes," said Mr. Donald, with a start; "perhaps we had."

I am no doubt ungrateful, but if I think a person likes me very much I am always inclined to tease, and really Mr. Donald looks absurdly fond of me to-day. I wish he would show his liking by being amusing—but he walks back in utter silence.

"Where have you been?" I ask, at last.

"We slept in London on Monday, and then came on." He looks at me with widely-opened eyes, as if he does not understand exactly what I am talking about.

I laugh. "I mean where have you been all these weeks?"

"Yes"—Mr. Donald looks a little confused—"we have been away a very long time; it seemed as if we should never get to Merdon again. We have been to Genoa and to Milan, and we crossed the Alps, and then we visited several French towns, and ended in Paris. Has the time seemed so very long to you?" he said, eagerly.

I tried hard not to laugh, but there was something so helpless and anxious in his question that I felt mischievous.

"It ought to have been much longer to me than to you, ought it not? I have staid here in Merdon quite quietly, with no one to amuse me but old Samuel, and yet you see I am alive."

Instead of laughing when I look up, I see that he is desperately grave; so serious and altogether old-looking that I feel as if he were my tutor instead of being Frank Newton's.

"I have missed our readings very much"—I try to speak as sweetly as I can. I cannot bear any one to be cross with me.

"Have you really?" and again Mr. Donald beams over with delight. This is absurd, because he used to be very calm and collected about these readings.

"When shall we begin them again?" I say, for he amuses me. I want to see whether his delight is genuine, or whether it will fade when its reality is tried.

"May I come to-morrow?" He looks so pleasant.

I feel that it is wrong, but it is irresistible. I cast down my eyes and hang my head as if I felt shy. "Yes," I say, in a timid way, as if I were as delighted as he was.

As I speak, we reach a turn in the road which leads up to the park.

"Thank you;" and then, quite in his usual quiet voice, "I must leave you here—good-by."

Angélique came nearer as soon as he was gone, but she did not speak.

My own thoughts were not satisfactory. I grew impatient of her silence.

"Angélique, why don't you speak? I believe you are longing to scold me."

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Angélique gave me a quiet, half-comic look.

"Why does mademoiselle suppose that I so wish?"

"Because I laughed at Mr. Donald, who is, of course, to be respected, as he is so much older than I am."

"Mademoiselle, if I wished to say something to you, it would not be because you have laughed. That might be perhaps—what will you?—a little uncourteous, but it would not have been wrong."

"Wrong!" the color flew over my face, and I felt that my voice was growing vexed, "dear me, I did not know I was as guilty as that—pray let me hear this wrong-doing."

There was a little pain in Angélique's face, but no anger.

"I think as mademoiselle is so young, and her marriage is not known—she should be careful how she speaks to gentlemen."

I stopped short in the road. I did not dare to speak, I was too angry—this was too insolent. I longed to tell her I was not married, but then this would upset all the little plan I meant to carry out when my father's letter arrived. My silence did not seem to frighten Angélique, she made no excuse, but stood beside me.

"I don't know what you mean," I said at last, haughtily; and then the sight of that quiet, saddened face made me feel ashamed.

"I am sorry to vex mademoiselle, but her manner to Monsieur Donald would make him think she cares for him very much, and it is impossible that she can do this when she has a husband."

I lost all control.

"Who told you I was married?"

"Madame told me so."

Angélique looked really surprised and troubled. I felt quite glad to have upset her equanimity.

"And did madame tell you the circumstances?"

"Yes, mademoiselle."

"Then you must know very well that I am just as free as if I had never been married, and that I do not consider that Captain Brand is my husband."

"Mademoiselle may not think so, but he is her husband, nevertheless."

"Nonsense!" I could hardly keep from stamping my foot. "Suppose we both agree to get this marriage set aside; suppose I do not care for Captain Brand?"

I stopped—silenced by the change in her face—she looked horror-struck.

"Mademoiselle, a marriage may not be broken—it is the ordinance of God."

I could not answer. I walked on dumbly but not subdued, and yet a cold, dead weight had fallen on my heart. I had never thought of my marriage in this light before.

CHAPTER XXV.

MY TWO LETTERS.

I COULD not sleep all night, and for the first time I realized some of Mrs. Dayrell's suffering, while I listened to the incessant cough—cough that surely must have shaken the bed on which she lay. But it was not her cough that kept me awake; that only chimed in with my own tormenting thoughts.

Madame La Peyre and Angélique were the only women who knew my secret, and they both gave the same unhesitating opinion. For the first time since I left Château-Fontaine a terrible real feeling of dread oppressed me, held me in check as if it were some giant.

What was I, after all? Only a girl of seventeen, old for my age, perhaps, but with very little knowledge of the ways and customs of real life, for I had begun to feel that these are not quite the same as the mere restraints of society. Had I been wrong all this time, trusting in my own ignorance? Was Captain Brand really my husband?

No! No girl could be married against her will, and I had never willed to be his wife. I turned my restless head from side to side. My pillow had been so cold when I went to bed, and now it seemed burning. Suddenly a new thought came. Why should I not get another opinion before my father's letter comes; tell the story as if it were not my own to some one who does not know Captain Brand?

Madame and Angélique are good, but they are not clever, and I want really clever advice. The sudden soothing lulled me; I fell asleep at last, wishing I knew a lawyer.

I woke with a start. Angélique was at my bedside.

"What is it?"

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I began to rub my eyes as if I wanted to rub them out; for the sunlight was shining in at my window, and I felt dazzled.

Angélique's cheerful face quieted me.

"It is that mademoiselle has slept so, so long, and madame would not let me waken her till now."

"Dear me, how tiresome!" I started up full of dismay—for I so dislike late rising, the whole day is sure to go crooked afterward.

I found Madame La Peyre sweet, and smiling, and affectionate, as ever; this is the charming part of her; she has no moods or caprices. For a day or two after her lecture on my marriage, I felt shy and stiff with her; but I am sure the stiffness was all on my side, and she is not only sweet, she is so bright.

"Well, my sleeping princess," she says, when I come in, "so the hundred years are over already. I came and took a little peep at you, and, my Gertrude, your eyes looked sealed up for a long, long time, and you had a so happy smile that I left you to your dreams."

"Had I. I was not very happy when I went to sleep"—she looked inquisitive, and I went on fast to check a question—"I did not tell you that we met Mr. Donald yesterday, and he is coming to give me a reading-lesson this afternoon."

Madame La Peyre looked troubled.

"I am very sorry, but you cannot receive him, my child. I have promised to teach the Miss Traceys how to do this fine embroidery."

I felt provoked.

"How industrious they are! I seem hardly able to find time for reading and practising, and they sketch, and do all sorts of things, besides. I wonder why I don't learn to embroider?"

"You have too little to do, my Gertrude, and so your time slips away. When we return to Château-Foutaine you will find many employments which I cannot give you here."

Here Angélique appeared—

"A letter for mademoiselle."

I was expecting to hear from Eugène.

I felt myself get red in an instant. I thought old Samuel had been treacherous, and had sent up Eugène's letter.

I can feel that Madame La Peyre is watching me.

But one look tells me the letter is not from Eugène—there is a foreign postage-stamp, but the handwriting is square and English-looking.

"My dear Gertrude." I look on to the end, and there, in firm writing, that somehow makes me feel afraid, is "George Brand."

I blushed, and then I felt so vexed that Madame La Peyre should sit watching me. I crossed over to my favorite window-seat. I can kneel up there in comfortable solitude.

"My dear Gertrude: I have been wishing to write ever since I left Merdon, but I have been so constantly on the move that I have had little leisure for even necessary letters of business. I hope the songs were what you liked." [I do not think I have said that, very soon after he went away, a box of music and books and periodicals came down from London. We found them a great help while our friends were away.]

"I think New York would amuse you very much. Life is very lively here both as to business and amusement. The ladies dress much more gayly and fashionably than they do in London. They seem to give themselves up very much to the study of dress. New York is a handsome, well-built city, and I should fancy very pleasant to live in.

"I have made a very interesting journey down the Mississippi, and went on from there to the far West, and got a week's hunting on the prairie—as wild, I fancy, as any thing in Australia—a place where, if you want to stay, you must build your own hut, and supply yourself with food and fuel. One of our companions set the prairie on fire, and the sight fully equaled any of the accounts I have read of such a scene. I should like you to have seen it—you have such enthusiastic power of admiration that it would have given you double enjoyment. I hope you will be so very kind as to answer me. I shall spend Christmas in New York; afterward I may possibly join my mother in Scotland; but I hope to be with you again by the end of January, and to find you as blooming as when I left you. I hope you do not suffer much from cold. I may stay longer next time, may I not? Will you present my compliments to Madame La Peyre, and

"Believe me,

"Your true friend,

"George Brand."

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I need not have blushed; why, except that one little sentence about staying longer next time, the whole letter might be put in a newspaper.

Ah, how different from Eugène's letters! But, then, he loves me. Well, I don't want Captain Brand to be in love with me, so why should I wish his letter to be different?

I turned round to Madame La Peyre—

"From Captain Brand," I said, carelessly, and I gave her the letter to read.

"I am not awake yet; I think I will go up-stairs."

She is reading the letter, and does not hear me. But I do not care; I want to get out without Angélique's surveillance. I want to see old Samuel. That dry, stiff letter has made me long more than ever for one from Eugène, and, if one comes, he will send it up to the house, as he did this one.

How can I answer Captain Brand? There is nothing to answer.

On the stairs I meet Angélique, who delays me with questions about a gown she is making for me; then, as I pass through the kitchen on my way out, the little blue-eyed child holds up its mouth to be kissed, and I stop and play with it.

I feel very impatient by the time I reach Samuel's cottage.

I went in at the door, and walked straight into his office.

"It be you, be it, missy?" He scarcely turned his head.

"Good-morning," I said, stiffly; "why did you send my letter up to the house?"

He went on writing in an old brass-cornered book; I spoke again, in a louder voice:

"Why did you send me a letter this morning? I told you I should call for my letters."

I grew very impatient. At last he stuck his pen behind his ear:

"So you did; so you did, missy"—Samuel turned slowly round on his stool to look at me with bland benevolence. I wish he did not remind me of the white-haired old gentleman who sold the spectacles to Moses Primrose—"and I should ha' kept 'em for'ee; but this was an oversight; it were along of Madam Angelick a-comin' in as hur were passin' for they letters, and she gets argufyin' about the rheumatics; hur never had they, so I says hur can't know how to physic they; my stomick is a English one, and madam's physic be furrin'; stands to reason them can't suit. Madam Angelick may be a good nuss; nussin' is mostly for women, but doctorin's for men—like most what is sensible; so, missy, as I was saying, I were worritted, and I ketches up the letters—they hadn't long been brought in, and there they was"—he pointed to his desk—"and I gives 'em to Madam Angelick in a lump, and never give yourn a thought till hur were out of sight."

"Very well; I hope you will be more careful," I said, gravely; and then I added what I had been longing to ask before: "then no other letter has come for me before that one?"

Samuel grinned; then he got up stiffly, went to a cupboard just behind me, and came back with a letter in his hand.

"Is it all right, missy?"

I saw at once that this was from Eugène.

I looked at Samuel, and my eyes fell at once; he looked so insufferably conscious that I had a secret.

I hardly know what I said; but I got away as quickly as I could, went home, and shut myself in my bedroom before I took the letter out of my pocket.

Then I sat down to read it. Oh, how happy I felt! It was even more loving—fuller of fond flattery—than the last. I read it over and over, and kissed it, and then I thought over Captain Brand's, and put them, mentally, side by side. Ah, if Madame La Peyre could only read Eugène's, she would no longer persist in her opinion of Captain Brand; for I suppose she considers a husband is bound to show some special friendship for a wife. I clasped my hands over my eyes, and sat thinking. My life is getting to be full of deceit. I used to detest mystery or any thing like a secret; now I am always planning how to hide; it is so humbling to feel that old Samuel suspects me; I must try and end it. I must try and carry out the purpose that came to me last night—find some one to consult. Yes, it is all very well to propose, but where am I to find this calm, collected friend, who will get me out of my difficulty?

I may go on staying at Merdon for months, and I am even less isolated here than I should be at Château-Fontaine; it will be more difficult there. Suddenly a sentence of my strong-minded governess came to me. She had lived

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with a family in the bush, before she lived with us, and she was quite a woman of resources—she used to say, "When one can't get what one wants, one must do with what one has."

Whom had I at Merdon? Mr. Tracey? No, he takes no interest in any thing but theological controversy and drainage. He would never give me his attention long enough to understand my trouble. There are Mr. Newton and Mr. Donald. I could not tell Frank Newton; I hardly know why, but I could not, he talks so openly about every thing. Mr. Donald is very clever, but I am afraid his is bookish cleverness—I fancy he knows the world through books much more than from personal experience of it. But still, my case may not be beyond him; he is not the person I should choose, but he is the best here. I will ask Mr. Donald. And then I remember, with dismay, Madame La Peyre's prohibition for this afternoon.

Some of these French rules are too absurd. I am sure, if Frank Newton called at the rectory when all the rest were out, Georgiana Tracey would be allowed to see him; but it is always "Not at home" for me if a gentleman calls in Madame La Peyre's absence.

Eugène's letter has filled me so full of happy thoughts that I dream on till dinner-time.

After dinner madame starts for the rectory, with Angélique to carry her little work-bag; and then I rouse to a consciousness of dullness, and of a longing to escape from it. I would go to sit with Mrs. Dayrell, only she has been ill all night, and extra quiet is needful for her.

I am restlessly idle. I long to do something to get through the day, and yet I cannot bring myself to settle down to any employment; I cannot sing, for fear of disturbing Mrs. Dayrell.

My father's letter cannot be much longer in reaching me; it might have come before this, but the weather has been stormy, and old Samuel told me that this would delay the Australian mail. Now that the time draws so near, I shrink from all there will be to do. I will not see Captain Brand again; the very liking I felt for him last time would make it very painful to tell him face to face that I love Eugène better than I love him. And yet, Captain Brand does not care about my love, or he would try to make me love him; he would not write me a letter I could show to every one. Whenever I think of that little talk in the cabin of the Eclair, I feel puzzled; he was so different, another man altogether; I like him better now, he is calmer, and I do not feel so afraid of him; perhaps he was much fonder of me then; it is possible that, since then, he too has met with some one else, and that he is as willing as I am to be released from this mock marriage. This idea piques me; I like every one to like me best. I do not want to be his wife, and yet I like to feel that Captain Brand will not be willing to give me up. But how shall I get through this long afternoon?

CHAPTER XXVI.

I TRY TO TAKE ADVICE.

I DECIDE at last to go and walk up and down the kitchen-garden field. The walk from the house to the brook has become very unlike my first sight of it. The ever-moving ash-branches are bare in all their blackness; there are ferns still, but they peep out at rare intervals, and look gray and withered; the kitchen-garden is empty, except for some plots of cabbages, and a border all down each side the path of pretty curled green stuff. But I think the change is greatest when I reach the brook; in the landscape one misses the golden fields ready for harvest; but there is still the brilliant green of the turnips; the dark earth of the ploughed land looks well against this, so richly suggestive of future crops; but the brook is utterly transformed; it has lost all its gay coloring; the willow-herb has died down to the roots, I suppose, for there is no trace of its presence; the water comes nearly to the top of the banks, and is not so clear as it was before the frost came; it is not frozen over to-day, but it seems still to be half congealed; the stream runs so slowly and sullenly, so unlike the sparkling, swiftly-moving brook that babbled so brightly over its many-colored bed. I stood leaning on the gate, and presently, without looking, I knew by instinct that Mr. Donald was coming along the path from the village. Really, I did not come here purposely to meet him, though I must have known that he would keep his appointment; but I grew suddenly shy and nervous; the task I had set myself took a

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real formidable shape; I felt it would be impossible to tell my story to Mr. Donald.

I opened the gate for him, but he seemed unusually cold and formal.

"I am afraid I cannot have the pleasure of reading with you, Miss Stewart, this afternoon, but I must go up to the farm. I want to see Madame La Peyre—I have to give her a message from Mr. Newton."

I looked up puzzled, and his sad, perplexed face did not help my comprehension; "Mr. Newton"—Mr. Donald usually calls him Newton, or Frank.

"Madame La Peyre is out; can I take the message? I will give it to her when she comes in." We are walking side by side along the walk bordered by those green curling plants, and I do not intend Mr. Donald to go farther than the ash-trees, if I can prevent him. I do not choose that Madame La Peyre should say I have disobeyed her.

"I hardly know"—a sudden look of anger comes into Mr. Donald's blue eyes—"but the message is about you. Mr. Newton wished me to ask Madame La Peyre to permit him to have a private interview with you to-morrow."

"A private interview with me!" I felt the color come rushing up to my temples.

Mr. Donald is looking at me, and I suppose he misunderstands my blush.

He smiles.

"A young lady generally understands the motive for a formal request of this kind."

His voice is so bitter, so utterly unfriendly, that tears come to my eyes in an instant. I feel surprised and offended at Mr. Donald's words.

"You need not trouble yourself to see Madame La Peyre; *I*"—I put a very haughty emphasis—"can answer the message: I cannot see Mr. Newton as he wishes. Will you tell him this, please?" I looked up at Mr. Donald; his face cleared as if by magic, but still he seemed a little anxious.

"Is Frank to take this as a refusal to his hopes?" he said; "he will be greatly cast down; he thinks"—Mr. Donald hesitated—"that—that you are favorably disposed toward him."

I had not felt quite sure of Mr. Donald's meaning before, but I felt very angry now. If Frank Newton had been brave enough to come and tell me he loved me, I should have pitied him so much I should perhaps have felt grateful, but to hear that he had told another man that I had encouraged him!

"Mr. Newton makes a great mistake," I said, abruptly; "I never thought of him except as an acquaintance;" and then I was sorry for my harsh words—I who so longed for love was angry with poor Frank Newton because he loved me.

We walked on in silence till we reached the ash-trees, and I stood still at the sharp turn leading to the farm. I glanced up timidly at Mr. Donald—to my surprise, he did not look angry with me for my unkindness about Mr. Newton.

There was, it seemed to me, a look of relief in his face, and a sweet, kind expression in his blue eyes, that made me long to cry.

"I ought to say I am very grateful to Mr. Newton, but you must excuse me. I am too troubled to think of what I am saying. I am"—I choked down a sob, and tried to keep the words back, but they came—"I am so unhappy—so lonely."

I turned my head away; I wished I had not seen that kind look in his eyes, and then I should have kept quiet; now my heart throbs, and I feel utterly uncomfortable.

Mr. Donald hesitates; then he says, slowly:

"But you have Madame La Peyre and your guardian."

I turn round on him full of scorn.

"And you consider they ought to satisfy me; well, then, they cannot. Ah, Mr. Donald, I am not one of your proper, conventional young ladies; I don't do as I ought. Oh"—I forgot Mr. Donald in my misery—"I am in great trouble, and I have no one to help me—no one to tell me what to do. Madame La Peyre could not understand, and my guardian is"—here I make a sudden effort at self-control—"he is a person I could not consult."

"Could I help you?" so gently, so timidly spoken that I am checked by surprise.

"I don't know;" but I am sure he cannot—he is too weak, or he would speak differently; it seems as if he read my thoughts.

There is a silence, and then—

I feel that he has come nearer, and his voice is full of strength and hope.

"Let me try to help you; a trouble is always lighter when it is shared."

Something in the tone makes my cheeks glow; something, too, tells me I had best be

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silent; and yet I will speak, and the words come out in a rush one upon another, in hurried agitation.

"I cannot tell you or any one—please go away; no one can help me."

Here I look up; Mr. Donald's eyes are fixed on my face. In an instant I feel that I have done something wrong, and that I must dart down the steep lane; but he does not give me time to think or to act.

He places himself between me and the lane.

"I cannot hide it any longer," he says, abruptly; "I love you; can you not give me hope?"

I stand like a stone; then I feel him take my hand, and my voice comes back.

"What shall I do?" I quickly draw my hand away. I can no longer keep from crying; "I asked you to be my friend. I can never care for you in any other way."

I turn away impetuously, and then, while I stand there trembling in every limb, and feeling that all this has been a dream, I hear quick steps going back along the road, and I know that Mr. Donald has gone away.

CHAPTER XXVII.

MRS. DAYRELL'S STORY.

"And I say to mademoiselle that I am not surprised, and I am very sorry—"

"Don't you talk of being sorry, Angélique; think how I feel. I considered Mr. Donald my friend, and now I can never speak to him again. I think men are horribly selfish and foolish; I am sure it was not my fault."

I had felt very wretched all the morning, and yet I could not make up my mind to tell Madame La Peyre what had happened. She is very sweet and loving, but she is not a safe confidante; she told Angélique every thing, though Captain Brand had enjoined secrecy. And yet I am perplexed, for how can I explain to her the estrangement which must henceforth exist between us and the park?

I took a diligent fit and staid in-doors in the morning, reading, but about mid-day I went out into the yard, and found Angélique contemplating her chickens; the pigeons flutter round and round her head, and, at last, one bolder than the rest settles on her shoulder. I seat myself on a huge block of stone beside the arched porch, and wonder how many girls have sat there with heavier hearts than mine.

In former times this must have been a manor-house. The sculptured arms over the porch, and over the chimney-piece in madame's bedroom, tell that people of a different sort from farmers have lived here, and from this stone doubtless fair young brides have mounted to the pillion behind their bridegrooms, and have been carried away into the world. I sigh, really not so much for myself as in thinking that some of these lives have been unhappy. But Angélique comes up to me.

"Mademoiselle is sad; is it that Merdon is dull? Will mademoiselle send word to the young ladies at the rectory to come and amuse her to-day?"

The idea of being amused by Georgiana Tracey is in itself amusing. I smile, and then I clasp Angélique's black sleeve and hide my eyes on it, and bit by bit, I hardly know how, I tell her about Mr. Newton and Mr. Donald.

"I am not surprised," she says, "but I am very sorry," and then she stands silently beside me.

"Why don't you speak?" her silence provokes me into petulance; "why don't you say it is not my fault?"

As I look up in my impatience, I meet those wise, dark eyes of hers, so full of kindness that I feel checked.

"Mademoiselle knows that I cannot say so—it cannot be undone now, but it makes me sad for the future of mademoiselle."

"If you are going to croak, you tiresome woman, I shall leave you here with the pigeons;" but though I announce this resolution with dignity, and turn away my head, I sit still on the mounting-block.

Angélique does not answer, and when I look round impatiently I am struck by her attitude. Her hands, which usually fall straight on each side of her narrow, black skirts, are clasped in front; her eyes are raised as if she is saying a prayer, but her lips do not move; they are pressed together in a straighter line than ever.

I feel my vexation slipping away; there is something soothing about Angélique, something that always reminds me of shade in summer heat.

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I do not like to interrupt her, but presently she spoke of her own accord.

"Mademoiselle asked about the poor madame;" she glances up to the bedroom story; "and I asked leave to tell her; it is strange how mademoiselle resembles Mademoiselle Barbare before she married Monsieur Dayrell."

"Did you know her so long ago?"

"It is not so very long—about ten years, perhaps; Miss Beaumont, that was her name, was to marry the brother of Monsieur La Peyre, and I was to go to England to fetch her to Château-Fontaine, that she might be acquainted with our own madame. Monsieur La Peyre had died long before. I shall not forget her on the journey; she was as wild as a *sauterelle;* at the railway-stations, and on landing from the steamer, I had trouble to keep her in sight; every thing was to her new and amusing; and yet she had lived in London, but with some very quiet, dull ladies, who did not like gayety, she said—"

"What detestable people!"

"Well, mademoiselle, I think it is better to be gay than sad; the butterflies are pleasanter to look at than the moths, who only come out to enjoy their life when all is dark and silent. It is impossible to be more charming, more gay, than Miss Beaumont, at Château-Fontaine. When we return to Normandy I will conduct mademoiselle to some cottages, and she will hear some old women speak in her praise.

"Well, mademoiselle, she staid for several weeks, and she seemed more and more happy, till Monsieur Dayrell arrive; then, perhaps it is in play, what do I know? but she begin to change; she and monsieur seem always to quarrel; and one day I found her in the library, when he have gone away from her, crying and sobbing. I ask her what is it? is she ill? and she say, 'No, Angélique; only wicked, so wicked that I like to make Mr. Dayrell unhappy.'

"Mr. Dayrell went away, and Miss Beaumont grew more happy again, but she was never quite the same. I went back to England with her, and, mademoiselle, when I came to her to say good-by, she put her arms round me, and she has kissed me.—She has said: 'Stay with me, to be my maid; never leave me;' but I was obliged to answer no, for I could not forsake my own madame."

"How long was it before you saw Mrs. Dayrell again?"—I had grown quite interested.

"I have never seen her again till we came here; often has madame asked for Monsieur and Madame Dayrell to visit Château-Fontaine, but they have always refuse, except once, and then monsieur came by himself. I was so surprise; he, who used to be so fine and handsome a gentleman, had grown thin and frowning; and, when I ask him how is madame, his wife, he frown still more: 'She is as well as usual,' he said, and then he turned away.

"They have never written, madame, till one day, there are some months, perhaps a year ago, a letter came; it was Mr. Dayrell who has written, and he asked madame to go to his wife; he was going to travel. Our madame was ill, and it was winter, and she could not go for, perhaps, a month, after the letter has come. When we come to the house in London, Madame Dayrell was not there; our madame waited on, and at last we heard she was visiting some friends, and was very ill; then madame went to her, and brought her here." Angélique stopped, and sighed.

"How unkind of her husband to leave her when she was ill!" I felt full of indignation.

"Madame was not ill when Mr. Dayrell went away; but, mademoiselle, I can never, never forget the change in her face; it was not that she had grown so thin, and that her beauty had faded, but it was the change from sweet to bitter. Ah, but is sad—"

Angélique stopped; she was not looking at me, her eyes were on the far-off moorland hills; there was a look of question in them, as if she were trying to get an answer.

"Mrs. Dayrell is unhappy, I suppose; perhaps she did not love her husband?"

I felt a sort of selfish relief. Surely, if madame and Angélique have witnessed the effects of one ill-assorted marriage, they will be too just to insist on mine.

"Yes, mademoiselle, I think madame has loved Monsieur Dayrell; but yet they are parted. I believe that Monsieur Dayrell has objected that madame should take so much pleasure in admiration, and madame has considered that, if she was loving and faithful to him, it did not signify; but she liked to be admired and followed, wherever she went. At last, when Mr. Dayrell found she would not change, he said they would go abroad togeth-

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er, to some far-off place, so that his wife might be separated from her admirers, and this has caused the quarrel. Monsieur Dayrell has written several letters to his wife, but I do not think, mademoiselle, that madame has written once to him; and yet, I am sure she loves him, and she wishes to see him, though she will never say so."

"But that is dreadful; cannot Madame La Peyre persuade her to write?"

Angélique shook her head.

"I do not think that our madame would care to speak about Monsieur Dayrell to madame. At first she has spoken, but it makes Madame Dayrell angry, and it is difficult to argue with a person who suffers; and now Mr. Dayrell has left off writing, and I do not think the poor madame could know where to send a letter, even if she chose to write."

I felt awe-struck; I had lived among quiet, calm people, and had read few novels; this seemed too terrible to be true. I could not realize that I knew a person who had destroyed and flung away love and happiness out of her life.

"Are you quite sure of all this?" I said, doubtfully; and then I glanced up. No! It was impossible that that earnest, steadfast woman could exaggerate or falsify any thing. "Angélique," I went on, eagerly, "don't you think, if we tried, we could find out—if you and I were to go and seek for Mr. Dayrell, I believe we should find him."

Such a look of pity came into her dark eyes. I believe Angélique would make the fortune of any artist she sat to for a Madonna, although there is so little actual beauty in her face, in the way of form or color.

"Mademoiselle," she said, gently, "we have all our work marked out for us; I think if mademoiselle and I were meant to go and find this gentleman, our way would be shown us; and, if I were to leave Madame Dayrell just now, I think she would suffer very much—she would not like a stranger to wait on her."

"Are you so very good a nurse, then?" I felt impatient that Angélique would not share my eagerness.

She shook her head.

"No, indeed, it is not that; but Madame Dayrell cannot bear a strange face; she will not tell how she suffers—it must be guessed. Well, then, mademoiselle, what will you? I am only the old *bonne* of her young days; I can watch her face, and it does not vex her. I may do any thing for her, and, when I am foolish, and do not please her, she can tell me so. *Allons*, but it is something, when one is suffering, to have some one to share the burden."

"You mean" (I smiled at Angélique's ingenuity) "that she can be cross to you whenever she chooses. Well, I dare say you are right, and I do not think you could be spared; but it is terrible that this husband cannot be brought back."

"We cannot know that," she said, softly. "His absence may be for good—all this was ordered long ago. Mademoiselle, all will come right, as it is willed."

This sounded so fatalistic and cold-blooded that I jumped off the mounting-block and went down to the gate.

Two or three black-faced pigs—I had incautiously befriended them lately by giving them some of the chickens' food—came trotting across the straw, squeaking and grunting, with their noses in the air and their tails in a coil.

"O Angélique! come, please come and drive the pigs away." I could not open the gate without letting some of my grunting friends out in my company.

Angélique smiles as she comes to my help; she has a way of smiling at me, and I believe she is laughing in her heart. I hurry on to the village, glad to be free of the pigs. I cannot return their liking; besides their greediness, they are so dirty and so insufferably curious, always peering and prying about every thing, whether it concerns them or not. They put me in mind of Rosalie. I have not thought of her for a long time, and I shiver at the remembrance. I must ask Eugène, when I write, how I shall manage to get his letters when we go back to Château-Fontaine, it will be so difficult to avoid Rosalie's spying.

And then I remember that, by the time we go back, I may have my father on my side, and that Eugène and I may perhaps write to each other openly, if my father approves, for I do not mean to have any more secrets. I had just reached the pump in the midst of the village; I paused. "How much has Eugène told his mother, I wonder? I must ask him." I have just reached the pump, and I hear "Missy! missy!" in Samuel's voice.

I turned suddenly; Samuel and two other

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old men were leaning against the low wall that surrounds the church-yard.

Samuel comes forward from the others, and half shuts one eye, in the way I dislike so much.

"What do you want?"

I spoke haughtily. It is detestable that this old man should assume a right of being in my confidence.

"If you'll come back along of I, missy, you shall see. I'm thinkin' you be in luck's way this week."

Spite of my trying hard to prevent it, I feel my face burn.

"What do you mean?" But I did not look at him.

"Well, missy, there be but one sort o' luck as goes out from my place, and that be letters; and one have come for Miss Gertrude Stewart this morning, and the post-mark on it be from some far-off, out-of-the-way place or another; and I were thinkin' three letters in one week would please ye, maybe."

"Oh, never mind," I said, indifferently, for I guessed that it was another letter from Captain Brand, "it can wait till I come back from the rectory; you can send it down to the farm for me."

I walked as fast as I could.

The clumps of Scotch firs on each side of the rectory-gates gave a cheerful look now that the other trees were leafless. The house itself was not interesting; low and white, with a slated roof; its best feature was that bow-windows came out at odd corners, where you did not expect them, and suggested quaint, comfortable rooms inside.

I was shown into one of these bow-windowed rooms. It was not pretty, so far as regarded arrangements and furnishing, but it had an amount of pleasant litter in it that made it very enjoyable; tables strewed with books, a high chimney-piece in dark oak reaching to the ceiling, and on the mantel-shelf a gathering of odds and ends in blue china; there were blue tiles, too, in the fire-place, and, while I waited for Mrs. Tracey, I amused myself watching the light flicker over the grotesque faces and figures. There were landscapes on some of the tiles, and one of the subjects reminded me strangely of Mount Wellington; the stiffness, too, in the foliage took me back to Australia. I sighed and looked more closely at the little picture; and yet, since I saw Eugène, I have not wished to be at home again. I should like to see my father; often a keen longing to be with him comes to me; but, then, I cannot remember that he ever seemed fond of me; and home without my mother, now that I have learned something of what my mother really was, seems dreary enough.

I moved closer to the fire, to see if there were any more subjects or landscapes, and a sudden thought came. Was the far-away place Samuel spoke of Tasmania, and was the letter from my father? I must go back instantly, and make old Samuel give me the letter. I rose up from my chair and stood thinking.

The fireplace was not in the middle of the room, but on one side of the door, and a huge Indian screen came circling round the cozy sofa in front of it, shutting in a book-table at one end and a little work-stand in front of an easy-chair at the other.

While I stood wrapped in this intense thought, I did not hear the door open behind the screen.

"I tell you she is a thorough flirt; she does not care for either Frank Newton or the tutor, only she will have the admiration of every man she meets with."

It was my friend Lina's voice, and she came out from behind the screen followed by her sister.

I did not look at Lina, I felt too confused.

"Oh, how do you do? does mamma know you are here?"—Lina spoke as easily and pleasantly as usual—"she will be delighted to see you."

Georgiana Tracey shook hands in silence. She is not polite, but I think she is more sincere than her sister is.

Mrs. Tracey came in before I could answer. I see how much younger I am than Lina is. I am still conscious and constrained, for I am sure she was talking about me. Mrs. Tracey always kisses me, and I do not care to kiss people unless I love them. A kiss seems such a sacred thing that I appear to be telling a silent falsehood when I receive Mrs. Tracey's succession of kisslets, which are so like the chirrup of a bird.

"So glad to see you, dear;" another chirrup; "what shall we do when you leave Merdon?"

The words came to me as words come when one awakens from sleep—my mind was

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completely absorbed. If that letter was from my father, then my doom, the fate of my whole life, was lying in Samuel's little room, and, in my foolish impatience, I had actually passed it by. I had sense enough left to know that I must not betray my agitation to Mrs. Tracey.

I had sat down mechanically by her on the sofa. I made some vague answer, and I saw her look at her daughter. I suppose she found my manner strange.

"How is dear Madame La Peyre? So very good and kind of her to give me that embroidery-lesson yesterday. Georgiana and Lina mean to do it for sale; isn't it clever of them?"

"For church purposes only," said Georgiana, loftily.

I smiled; with all my preoccupation I wondered what difference it could make what they did with the money; it seemed to me like other amateur goods, an attempt to save their own purses at the expense of those to whom needle-work was a means of living.

"Mrs. Dayrell is very ill." I spoke abruptly, I longed so for an excuse to get away that I hardly knew what I said.

"Ah, poor thing! I should have been so glad," says Mrs. Tracey, in her most sugared tone, "to have seen something of Mrs. Dayrell; I know some of her people—Lord Beaumont's family—they are all charming."

Mrs. Tracey said this kind of things in a way which I thought insufferable. Any one who had a title, or belonged to some other person thus dignified, was always "charming."

"Poor Mrs. Dayrell is not charming."

Mrs. Tracey patted my hand, and laughed.

"She says those things in such a bright, saucy way, that it is irresistible." Then she turned quickly to her daughters, "I forgot if you have seen Mrs. Dayrell, girls?"

"I saw her once being drawn in her chair," said Georgiana, "and I thought she looked like a lady."

"My dear! what else could she look like? she comes of a very old family indeed. She is connected with the Howards, and one of her uncles married the great-niece of a duke."

I knew while Mrs. Tracey spoke that this was actually the creed in which I had been reared in my own home; but then with us it had been felt, not asserted. Besides, my mother would not have said such a one was a lady because she happened to be well descended; the inference she would have drawn was that a well-born woman ought to justify the circumstance of her birth by good behavior, and I knew that she disliked people to talk about family connections; she said it was quite as offensive as pride of money, or any other kind of personal obtrusiveness.

I say all this now to salve my conscience, I suspect, for it was simple contradiction then that made me differ from Mrs. Tracey.

"I don't see that belonging to an old family can make people refined and gentle, unless they are so naturally."

Mrs. Tracey smiled at her daughters.

"Ah, it is very well for you to talk in that way, but, my dear, it is in the blood—a born gentleman or a born lady cannot be ill-bred."

"I am not sure of that," I said, gravely. I had no reason for contradicting Mrs. Tracey, but I felt inclined to show her that I could be rude if she teased me much longer.

"Have you heard from home lately?"

The question set my impatience ablaze; I rose.

"No; I hope to hear soon. I must go home now, I think."

"Oh, pray don't hurry.—Girls, I hope you have planned a walk with Miss Stewart. You can't think"—this was said low, with her farewell kissing—"how much my girls enjoy being with you!"

I did not answer; it seemed to me that every thing was hollow, and false, and unreal. I had always distrusted Mrs. Tracey's sweetness from instinct, because she gave it so spontaneously; but I had believed in Lina, and she had seemed very fond of me, and now I knew her real opinions, and how false she was. I could scarcely shake hands with Lina; actually, Georgiana, the stiff, formal member of the family, was the only one of the Traceys, to-day, to whom I said a cordial good-by.

When I remember the pace at which I came down the break-neck lane that leads from the high-road to the rectory, I wonder I reached the bottom in safety. A strange, unreasoning terror had seized me, that some mischance would happen, and that I should

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never see this coveted letter; and also, now that it had arrived, the reliance I had felt in its authority crumbled, and I was beset with doubts and misgivings. Was I wrong, after all? Was a husband's authority more real than a father's, and could Captain Brand set aside all opposition?

I reached the post-office at last.

"Samuel!" I called from the window; there was no answer. "Samuel!"

I had no patience to wait; I went to the door, which, instead of standing open as usual, was close shut, but it opened when I turned the handle.

Samuel was not in, and when I stood at the foot of the little staircase and called, no answer came.

My calling had attracted attention, and a little group of school-children had clustered round the door, and greeted me when I appeared, with widely-opened blue eyes.

"Where's Samuel?" I said, sharply, to a red-cheeked boy, who stood eying me, with one fat finger in his mouth.

For answer he turned to a girl just behind, but she tried to hide her face in her sun-bonnet when she found herself drawn into notice.

"Where's grandfeather, Elsie? her"—the wet finger was pointed stolidly toward me—"be a callin' for he."

The girl looked at me, and then hid her face on the boy's shoulder. I had begun to smile at her, but at this I frowned with impatience.

The boy shook Elsie off, and then he saw my frown, and paused, with his mouth open.

"Ask her where Samuel is."

The boy looked away, stuffed both hands in his pockets, and fell back into the little group. Feeling himself in safety at that distance, he yelled out:

"Him's gone to Charley; him 'ull stay till noight."

And then he set the example to the rest, and they darted off helter-skelter till they were safely hidden among the elm-trees.

I stood still; a sudden dull stupor had taken the place of my impatience.

I went slowly home across the brook.

There was no one in the yard when I reached it; I passed through the kitchen, and the old man called to me from the fireside.

"Missy, ye be not to go up-stairs above a bit, the poor madam is taken wuss, and madam herself has gone for the doctor, so that he may make more speed."

A pang of reproach went through me; how selfish I had been; so utterly wrapped in my own feelings about this letter that I had quite forgotten Angélique's sad story; even when Mrs. Tracey spoke of Mrs. Dayrell I had not remembered it. It all came back now, and my letter faded for the time into insignificance.

I listened at the stair-foot, but I could not hear any thing; even Mrs. Dayrell's cough was still; an awe crept over me; I went as softly as I could into the parlor.

There was a letter lying on the table, but I did not look at it. Presently, as I crossed the room, and put down my hat and cloak in the window-seat, I saw the Australian postage-stamp. I did not take it up as eagerly as I expected—the glow and life had been taken out of every thing this morning.

Yes, it was my father's handwriting. My senses wakened at this sight, and my heart beat so thick and fast that it seemed to fill my throat. I opened it and read; but I will give the letter itself:

"My dear Child"—the tender word brought tears so quickly and passionately that I could not go on reading, and, when I did, I had blistered the paper with the scalding drops—"your letter troubled me very much; we had heard of the loss of the Adelaide, so that I was, in a measure, prepared for your sad news. We had feared you were both lost; therefore, in the midst of our sorrow, it was a comfort to find that you, my dear Gertrude, had been spared. I consider that your beloved mother acted with her usual wisdom in accepting Captain Brand as your husband; you are too young to appreciate this wisdom, and it is this part of your letter which troubles me. I cannot bear to think of your position if she had not given you this protector, for you would have reached England in an utterly friendless and deserted state. Your mother could not have burdened Madame La Peyre with you but for the liberality of Captain Brand. He writes me a manly, generous letter; the provision he makes for you now, and also in the event of his death, ought to satisfy any girl. Acting on the references which he furnishes, and which your dear mother's letter also con-

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tains, I have made inquiries about him, and I hear him highly spoken of by every one. It is true, and I am glad that you, Gertrude, as my own daughter, should feel this somewhat —that, under more genial circumstances, the captain of a merchant-ship is not exactly the husband I should have found for you; but your dear mother was an excellent judge of human nature, and she must have had much opportunity for judging Captain Brand; you may be sure he will make you a good husband. Therefore, now, my dear child, may God bless you! I repeat that your first feeling is natural, because it is merely a carrying into action the principles in which you have been reared. But now that you have my full permission to love your husband as a wife ought to do, and to make him happy, you will see him with different eyes, if you have not done so already. By this time, no doubt, you have grown more reconciled. I will not again allude to expressions in your letter, evidently the result of your sad position at the time of your mother's death—a position I greatly deplore, and yet which might have been so much worse—still it is best to say that, even if I had the will to set aside this marriage, I have not the power; also I have not the means to provide for you either in England, or to enable you to return here, unless I commit an act of injustice to your sisters, who, remember, are both unmarried, and wholly unprovided for. You are now entirely dependent on your husband, and I rejoice that he is so generously disposed toward you. He tells me that, after his next voyage, he intends to give up his profession, for a time at least, and settle down into domestic life in England. In all ways you are a happy girl, my Gertrude, and I have written by this mail to tell your husband that I am completely satisfied with your mother's choice. Your sisters are from home, and are still ignorant of the news in your letter; it will be a great surprise for them."

Then came a courtly message to Madame La Peyre, the wording of which brought my father more visibly before me than any part of the letter had done, and then the signature:

"Your affectionate father,
"ALGERNON REGINALD H. STEWART."

CHAPTER XXVIII.

SAYING GOOD-BY.

I CAN never know how long I had sat in my room bowed down with shame and sorrow. I was roused at last by the sound of my name.

"Gertrude, Gertrude, my child!"

It was Madame La Peyre's voice. I got up and opened the door, but I first thrust my open letter into my pocket.

"Barbara wants to see you, my dear. I do not think she will be long with us, Gertrude. Will you come and take leave of her?"

I could not speak. I bent my head mechanically and followed her.

The wind rustled across the long, uneven passage. Now and then it made some of the old timber strain and creak with a sudden sound like the sharpness of a hard woman's voice.

Madame La Peyre stopped at the door and knocked gently. I shrank back. My father's letter had brought that awful death-scene in the boat so vividly before me that I dreaded the sight of Mrs. Dayrell's face.

Angélique opened the door, and she looked earnestly at me. She must have seen my agitation, for she whispered to me while Madame La Peyre passed on to the bedside, "Mademoiselle need not be afraid; since an hour madame suffers less."

Mrs. Dayrell was lying propped up by pillows, over which her long, fair hair streamed in profusion. Her mouth was wide open, the lips drawn away from the teeth as if to give the laboring breath freer passage; she panted, and her distended eyes showed me, spite of Angélique's assurance, that she was still suffering. I had thought the day chilly out-of-doors, but I saw that the window was partly opened.

Mrs. Dayrell smiled, and moved her thin hand toward me.

"You have come at last, Gertrude; in your place I would have come oftener." She paused for breath, and I felt resentful to Madame La Peyre, who had brought this reproach on me. "Youth is as refreshing to a sick woman as sunshine is.—There," she went on after a little, "you need not take it to heart; you have your excuse; I know how dull I am, and how vexatious."

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At this the tears began to run down my face, and I pulled out my handkerchief to stop them.

Mrs. Dayrell looked away. I think it vexed her to see a sorrowful face beside her, for I observed that Madame La Peyre was smiling when the invalid's wild blue eyes turned to her.

"Yes, Eugénie, it surprises you no doubt to hear me call myself names; but it is Angélique who has taught me. I sometimes quite hate her for the way in which she makes me see I am wrong and disagreeable."

Madame La Peyre looked at the *bonne* in sudden wonder at the charge, and a flush of shame mounted to Angélique's forehead.

"I beg madame's pardon," she said, humbly, "if I have forgotten myself; madame will, I hope, believe that I could not have intended to teach her."

"Thou art an old goose, *ma mère*," and here she gasped painfully. I followed her eyes as they rested on Angélique, and I was surprised; all the fierce, hard light had fled from them. I almost fancied I could see tears. "Dost thou never guess how thy patience and sweetness teach, then, old woman? Why, sometimes, Eugénie, I go on from bad to worse to see how much she will bear, and the only rebuke she ever makes is silence." She leaned back exhausted, and no one spoke.

Presently she said, faintly, "You may all go—all—I want to be alone."

Madame La Peyre kissed one of the wasted hands that lay stretched out on the bed, and I was going to follow her example, but, as I stooped, Mrs. Dayrell lifted up her hand and laid it on my head.

"Child," she whispered, "do you know I wish I could change places with that poor old nurse?" and then she waved her hand toward the door.

I followed Madame La Peyre down-stairs.

"Will she die, madame?" I said.

Madame La Peyre had flung herself into an arm-chair in the parlor, and was giving way to an agony of grief which terrified me. I had never seen a grown-up person give way to violent sorrow. She bowed her head in answer, but she went on crying.

I confess I was surprised. I did not think madame was so fond of her sister-in-law.

She sat up after a bit and dried her eyes.

"My poor Barbara," she said, "and we cannot make her happy among us; it is sad to think how little happiness she has had in her life."

This set me off thinking.

Is it because Madame La Peyre and Angélique have known so much happiness in their lives that their faces have that look of serene peace? Peace is hardly the word for it; there is no monotony in the look. I mean it is so full of brightness. Is it because she has known so much sorrow that Mrs. Dayrell's face is so wild and stormy?

At this my father's letter comes back, and I feel mad with shame and anger.

It is bad enough that my own father should cast me off, should hand me over to a man he has never seen—but till now I have never realized my dependence. Then it is Captain Brand and not Madame La Peyre who has paid all my expenses since I left the Adelaide. I spoke once to her about it, and she told me she was keeping account, and it would all be settled some day, and I had hoped to find a draft in my father's letter which would have enabled me to free myself.

In my selfishness I forgot Mrs. Dayrell and Madame La Peyre's grief. I turned suddenly to her.

"Does Captain Brand give you money to spend for me?" I said, abruptly.

There was quite a shocked look on her gentle face, but she spoke courteously.

"I wish you would not ask me, my dear child."

"Pardon me, I must ask," I said, stubbornly; "it is necessary I should know."

"But the captain wished to keep this from your knowledge. I cannot tell why this is, Gertrude; but, as I have said so much, I tell you that I would not accept all he wished to give, and that I am sure you will not find it easy to expend even that which he has arranged to pay."

I trembled with vexation.

"I will not spend any, madame; do not give me any more clothes or books. I would rather wear rags than spend his money."

She looked frightened as well as shocked; at last she pointed upward.

"Take warning," she said, solemnly; "I believe you know Barbara's sad story, and how my poor sister, who drove her husband from her, repents bitterly, and wearies to see him once before she dies."

I shuddered—something in the sick-room

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up-stairs had made death real, and I shuddered at the thought of death.

"But he is her husband, and she loves him, and I do not, cannot love Captain Brand."

"My child, it is useless to discuss the question; it is always useless to discuss that which is irrevocable." Madame reminded me of the abbé, as she said this with calm dignity. "When you and Captain Brand are always together, my dear child, you will love him as husbands and wives should love one another; you have some ideas which do not exist in real life, they are only to be found in romances; it is, I think, the fault of your education; it was the same with my poor Barbara."

Madame again put her handkerchief to her eyes, but I do not think there were any tears; she only wanted to quiet me.

For the time I was doubtless mad under the bitter humiliation and disappointment that had come upon me. I went out and stood beneath the stone porch. The bitter wind had fulfilled its mission, and thick flakes of snow were falling so fast that the pig-yard was already whitened.

I went out bareheaded, and let the snow fall wet and heavy on my hair and dress. I did not shrink from the cold; my head was burning, and my blood seemed to be rushing like fire through my veins. I should have stood there much longer but for Angélique.

She came out from the porch, took my arm, and led me in before I could decide on resistance.

"I want to tell mademoiselle about our poor madame," the sly old woman said; she moved into the kitchen, and I followed her. No one was there except the old man in the ingle-nook. Angélique shut the door, caught up a towel, and began to dry my hair and shoulders.

"Mademoiselle Gertrude"—there was a grave, sad smile on her lips—"it is true our madame is better—better than I could have hoped; but I will ask mademoiselle to wait yet a little before she gives me another patient up-stairs."

I blushed. I felt how childish I had been; in contact with Angélique, somehow my anger shrank into pettiness. I was not afraid of her, but I could not bear to lose her esteem.

"I am very unhappy, Angélique, and not by my own fault this time."

"Then I must take the better care of mademoiselle," she said, affectionately, and began to rub me with a fresh towel."

CHAPTER XXIX.

A FELLOW-PASSENGER.

NEXT morning the snow lay thickly on the thatch, and on the trees, and on the hills, though some of them sent their brown shoulders through the dazzling whiteness, as if in shivering they had pushed them bare.

While Angélique was so much engaged with Mrs. Dayrell, Mrs. Cornish, the farmer's wife, helped the girl who waited on us. She was laying the breakfast-table when I came in, and she pointed to the windows. They were really beautiful. I could make out landscapes, and trees, and flowers, in the silver tracery of hoar-frost. I had never seen any thing so beautiful, and I longed to go out among the snow-laden trees. I heard that Mrs. Dayrell was still sleeping—she had had a very restless night, and I was to breakfast alone, without Madame La Peyre.

I was glad to be alone; I was full of myself and my trouble; my mind was full of sorrow and perplexity. Selfish as I was, that morning my sorrow was not all caused by my father's letter. I thought much of Mrs. Dayrell and her husband. Angélique's manner, when she told this sad story, implied that I was only told it as a lesson for myself. As yet, I could not see the application; it would certainly be sinful and wrong, in every way, for a married woman to flirt, but then that is a thing that everybody knows. I cannot see that I am in this position. Does Angélique mean that it is wrong to flirt at all?

Mrs. Cornish came in. She made an excuse about the coffee, but she stood chattering, and I was not in a mood to enjoy her broad Devonshire talk, as I have done till now. I felt chilled and silent, and I wanted to get away from every one.

"If madame asks for me, you can say I am walking up and down the kitchen-garden."

I dared not go into the high-road. I felt that I was so changed from my ordinary self that, if I met the Traceys, they must notice something unusual, and I shrank much from meeting Mr. Donald.

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I looked at the snow, lying in white, unbroken masses far as my eyes could reach, dazzling in its whiteness beneath the lowering, leaden sky; but the trouble that lay at my heart—the unsifted thoughts, and the inward misgiving that would keep them ever rising, soon drew my attention to my own affairs again. Does Angélique mean that it is wrong to flirt at all? My natural resource and refuge was to try to recall home-teaching on this subject. I am not sure that I have heard it much discussed, but I think my mother has spoken of a flirt as an unladylike, undignified girl, certainly not as a wicked person. After all, what is flirting? It is possible I may have flirted without knowing I did it. I never saw any one flirt, but I fancy it means liking to amuse one's self with the admiration or perhaps the love of others. I stop, blushing; that would certainly be wrong and selfish; but, after all, every one must like to be loved, and I cannot help Mr. Donald's liking me much more than I thought he did. Ah, I know now it was not all for Mrs. Dayrell and her husband that I was so heavy-hearted this morning. I am standing near the ash-trees, and I see again Mr. Donald's bent head and crouching figure just as I saw them then. Poor fellow! he was so timid, so shy even; he would never have said that he loved me if he had not thought I—well, that I should like to hear it. I cover up my face with my hands—I feel as if I must shut out daylight—there seems to be a struggle in my mind which I cannot conquer. I am either going mad, and so fancying foolish thoughts, or it is true that I am not what I think I am—the Gertrude I have seen in myself was a frank, truthful, generous girl, who certainly could not do a meanness—and it is hard to write down what I see instead. Now I understand what Angélique meant when she said I should not try to make every one love me. Thoughts rise like waves, rolling one over another. I have got so confused and unhappy, that I wander on, not caring where, and pass through the little gate beyond the ash-trees; suddenly I rouse, some distance along the high-road.

I look round me scared. I have been walking a long while. I am tired, and my boots are covered with crusted snow.

"Well," I say, and I push my hat back from my hot forehead, and let the keen, chill air rest there; "I am cured for the present; I will not try to make any one care for me again in a hurry. I will be as formal and disagreeable as Georgiana Tracey is."

I turned toward home, and began to walk as fast as I could. When I reached the ash-trees, I saw Madame La Peyre standing near the gate of the cabbage-garden, looking round her with an anxious, troubled face.

I ran forward and kissed her on both cheeks almost before she saw me coming.

"Did you think I was lost?"

"Ah! my child." She kissed me so tenderly that I felt ashamed of my heedlessness. "But I was puzzled where you had gone, because Mrs. Cornish said you were in this garden. But come into the house with me, Gertrude; I have so much to tell. So much has happened this morning."

"Is Mrs. Dayrell better?" I felt sure she was, Madame La Peyre looked so much brighter.

"Yes, yes, she is better. But, Gertrude, a visitor has come—a Mr. Howard—to see you. He is a clergyman—why, my child, are you ill? What is it, then?"

I leaned against the stone-wall beside the road leading down to the farm-yard. I felt sick and faint. When I parted from Mr. Howard on board the Eclair, he was very ill, and I had no prospect of coming to England. I had rejoiced in the thought that I should never see again this only witness of my marriage, and of all that sad, dreadful time.

"I have been walking very fast," I said. "It is nothing—I shall be better soon."

But I had frightened her, and she made me lean on her arm, and did not speak again except to ask me how I felt, till she had arranged me comfortably on her own sofa. I had also to drink a tumbler of *eau sucrée* before she would finish her story.

"Well, my child, it is strange how things happen. Mr. Howard is an old friend of Mr. Tracey, and he comes to stay with him yesterday, and they speak of you, and so as early as possible he comes to see you—he is so sorry to have missed you."

"Yes," I said, indifferently. I saw that Madame La Peyre had not finished, and I shrank from hearing that Mr. Howard had told my story at the rectory—the very thought made me giddy again.

"It is strange how events are ordered. Mr. Howard says, too, that he has met, some months ago, at Sydney, before his voyage, a

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Mr. Dayrell"—I began to listen eagerly—"this gentleman has been thrown from his horse, and Mr. Howard has visited him, as they were in the same hotel; and I think Mr. Howard has been very kind—"

I interrupted her.

"But does he know where Mr. Dayrell is now?"

"He says that this gentleman—it is possible, Gertrude, that it is not my brother Henri—was to leave Sydney when he was strong enough, and to go direct to France to see his relations."

I started up on the sofa. "Madame, it is he, and he may be now at Château-Fontaine. You will tell Mrs. Dayrell this news, and it will cure her; and we will all go as soon as possible to Normandy."

Madame La Peyre shook her head.

"Be reasonable, my child; France is a large country, and there may be other persons named Dayrell. I could not tell my poor Barbara any thing unless I was sure that Mr. Howard has seen her husband."

I walked up and down the room in my excitement.

"Oh, yes! it is our Mr. Dayrell, and, if he came back in time, she would recover, madame. The news that he has been heard of will bring her back to life. Oh! do let us tell her there is hope—please do!"

I hugged madame while I spoke, and kissed both her cheeks.

"Was there ever so enthusiastic a child?" Madame smoothed her ruffled hair with her handkerchief—she was too dainty to do this with her little, white fingers. "When shall we make a reasonable woman of thee, my Gertrude? Perhaps never. There are natures very like grass, my child: tread them down, freeze them, or scorch them, they suffer for the time—for they are never insensible, these fresh natures—only they always spring up green and bright and ever young as soon as they get the dew or the sunshine they require."

I got impatient with this sentiment when I was so excited.

"But you will tell her—"

"I will consult Angélique; she watches Barbara so constantly—and, besides, Angélique has much wisdom. She will say whether such news will do good or harm; and I must see Mr. Howard again and ask questions."

When Madame La Peyre speaks in that sweet, grave manner, I find it hard to go against her; there is something very powerful in inert softness. I remember once trying to lift a feather-bed, and I was surprised at the resistance it made.

"There are many doubts to be weighed," she went on. "It may not be Henri, or he may be still in Australia; or, it is possible," madame said, in a pretty little precise way, which put me out of patience altogether, "that good Mr. Howard has deceived himself about the name."

I believe I should have made a very intolerant answer, but madame spoke before I could get out the words.

"Here comes Angélique; I will tell her. Now, run away, Gertrude, while I consult her."

CHAPTER XXX.

THE POWER OF HOPE.

I soon went back to Madame La Peyre Angélique was coming out of the room; there were tears in her eyes, but she looked very happy.

"Well," I said, "she is to be told; you are not going to keep it from her?"

"Madame will tell mademoiselle;" and Angélique stood aside to let me pass, as if she had no voice in the matter, although I knew perfectly well that Madame La Peyre had been guided by her judgment.

"You must be patient, Gertrude," madame says, looking up from her embroidery, "and you must not be romantic. Angélique thinks that we may tell the news gently, but not till to-morrow morning."

"And suppose she is worse this afternoon, and dies?" How can these two old women delay? They forget how young people live on hope.

Madame shook her head.

"The doctor said this morning that we must be very careful. It seems that the sleep she has now fallen into is a sort of crisis; therefore, we must be patient till to-morrow."

Again I felt suppressed by madame's calm wisdom—so much deeper than I had expected from her; and yet what a thing is lip-wisdom!

About nine o'clock in the evening Mrs. Dayrell roused. Madame La Peyre was sit-

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ting by her, for Angélique had lain down to get a little rest after her long, anxious watching. I was near madame, but she signed to me to go away as soon as the sick woman moved.

I had not been down-stairs half an hour, when madame came hurrying into the parlor. She seated herself in perfect silence, and, when I looked, I saw that she was disturbed —frightened, I fancied.

"What has happened—is she alone?"

"No." Then madame's penitence overcame her, and she wiped her eyes. "Ah, ma petite! it is all very easy to preach to you about imprudence, but it is difficult to act out one's own teaching. I do not know how—I fancy our poor Barbara is too clever for me—but in some way she has divined from my face that I have a secret which I am keeping from her. Then she raises herself and cries out, 'You have news of Henri; tell me—tell me quick.' What will you, Gertrude? I was alone, and I cannot be hard, and take away from my poor Barbara this crumb of hope of which she seems to make so much. So I say to her all which Mr. Howard has said. 'I will see Mr. Howard—now, this minute;' and my poor Barbara sits upright in bed, with a large red spot on each cheek, and her eyes so bright, that I am in terror. 'Do you hear me?' she says, angrily. 'Go and send for this person.' I got up and went and told Angélique, and Angélique says I must now send for Mr. Howard, and that she is anxious for Barbara. It is possible, my child, that there may be a relapse;" and Madame La Peyre began to cry very pitifully.

She had sent a messenger to the rectory before she came to me, and while I was still trying to comfort her, the boy came back with a little penciled note. It was from Mrs. Tracey. The rector and his visitor had gone to Charlford, and were not expected back till next morning. I hear this morning that Mrs. Dayrell could not be pacified, and she has been awake all night.

I do not think Madame La Peyre has slept either, her eyelids look so red and swollen as she sits opposite me at breakfast.

We have just finished breakfast, and Mrs. Cornish comes in:

"The gentleman as came yesterday be in the lane," she said; "him'll be comin' this way, I'm thinking. Shall I show he in?"

Madame La Peyre had to make such an effort at composure, that I think she will not be able to lecture me on my enthusiasm, as she calls it, for some time to come.

"The dear, good man!" she said. "Yes, yes, Mrs. Cornish, I will go and meet him."

I shrink from Mr. Howard, or I, too, would go and meet him. I long to tell him that Mr. Dayrell must be brought back to his wife. Now that they know how they love one another, they cannot surely quarrel again. It seems to me that love blots out all faults. I am sure whatever Eugène may do, I shall always think him right. The snow has melted near the house, and I stand looking at the dear little flowers just outside our window. Mrs. Cornish has filled a shelf there with pots of yellow and purple crocuses; there are some exquisite white ones, too, and a few delicate primroses. It is very sweet to look at them: but it seems strange to be having winter and winter flowers in January. I think I like best to watch the delicate blue-green of the slender snow-drop stems making their way out of the brown mould, and hanging down their white bells as if the stalk were too fine to hold them erect. The primrose-leaves, too, are so exquisite. When they come out all freshly unrolled they are like the delicate net-work inside a dear little baby's hand.

Our baby has been sent away, lest it should disturb Mrs. Dayrell. I did not think I should miss the merry little darling so much; but it is such a dear little time-waster! Madame La Peyre never likes it to come into the parlor. I do not think she is very fond of babies; but I often see Angélique carrying it in her arms, and I always stop and play with it a few minutes as I go in and out. I wonder if trouble, and tears, and vexations, will come to it some day?

Till now I have scarcely had time or will to reason out my father's letter. This morning it presses on my heart like lead. Disobedience feels like sin, and yet I consider that, loving Eugène as I do, it would be wicked to think of myself as married to Captain Brand. I am willing to bear my own faults. I love Eugène of my own free-will; and, if this is wrong, I will bear any suffering that may come from it. But I was married without my will. That was not my fault; I had nothing to do with it. I was like a doll, or an automaton; and I will

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not make that which was only a weakness into sin and misery. If my father knew about Eugène, surely he would change his opinion.

I do not know what to do. Shall I write to Captain Brand, and tell him all the truth? —this will set me free from this horrible deceit and concealment. But how can I confess to him or to any one that I love Eugène? No, no, no; the very thought scorches my face with shame; and, besides, even if I could get courage to say it, Captain Brand does not think of me as a woman, he is so calm, and cold-blooded, and reasonable. He will answer: "You are only a child; you don't know your own mind. By the time I come back to live in England, you will have grown to like me."

Yes; there is no use in trying to deceive myself, but that is the calm, common-sense view Captain Brand will take; and that is the calm, common-sense life he means me to lead. I will not lead it.

All at once, as I reach this point, I remember my last idea about Captain Brand; that he no longer cares about being married to me, and may perhaps wish himself free to marry some one else.

If this is so, it is better to appeal to him, and not to my father. Madame La Peyre says she expects him in February, and he has promised to write beforehand and announce his arrival.

I will wait till February, and then I will write and tell him exactly what I feel; and ask him not to see me again, but to try and get this marriage set aside.

Just as I made this resolution, Madame La Peyre came back.

"Well," I said, eagerly, "is it all right? is it her husband?"

"Ah, my dear child, I cannot tell you. Barbara has told me to go away, and Angélique also. She will not speak before us. I have been waiting for Mr. Howard, but he is still with her."

I forgot my dread of seeing Mr. Howard, in eagerness about this story which is acting under my eyes. I felt intensely interested in Mr. and Mrs. Dayrell.

We had not to wait long for Mr. Howard. He looked so benevolent, and so delighted to see me, that I lost some of my shrinking.

"Ah!" he shook both my hands heartily. "You are less surprised to see me than I was to hear that you were in Merdon. I told you that my home was in the south of England."

"I remember now," I said.

"And how is Captain Brand?"

I flush angrily.

"I have not seen him lately."

And then dear Madame La Peyre came to my help, and said several pleasant sentences to Mr. Howard, in that charming, graceful way which makes her so different from any one I ever saw. If I had been born in France, then perhaps I could have answered Mr. Howard easily and sweetly, instead of turning red and looking cross. It must be so pleasant to have, by nature, a manner that is always sweet and courteous, and yet which has the air of perfect sincerity. Madame La Peyre is so simple. Mrs. Tracey's politeness is a very poor imitation; as much like the original as a French translation of one of Shakespeare's plays is.

Mr. Howard is not quick-witted or graceful; he is very downright and abrupt.

"Do you expect the captain down again soon?" He turned to me almost while Madame La Peyre was speaking.

I wanted to put an end to his questions, but I did not know what to say.

"No," I say, coldly; "but really I know very little about him. I have only seen him once since he brought me to Madame La Peyre."

There is a silence. I think Mr. Howard is looking perplexed.

Madame began at once to question him about Mrs. Dayrell.

"I think your doctor has frightened you," he said, gravely. "Mrs. Dayrell does not appear to me to be so very ill. I should not leave her much alone with her own fancies, if she were in my charge. Adieu, madame; I will see her again soon."

And then he hurried off. "Mrs. Tracey is waiting," he said; and he resisted all madame's persuasions to repose himself a few moments. He looked very earnestly at me as he shook hands, as if he wished to say something; then he stopped and chatted an instant with the poor, sick man in the ingle-nook; told Mrs. Cornish, laughingly, that her floors wanted rolling; and then went off smiling through the pig-yard. I felt relieved when he was quite out of sight.

"That is a good man," madame said; "but he is more brusque than Mr. Tracey is."

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"Ah! but he is sincere; I am sure he is. May I go and see Mrs. Dayrell to-day?"

"We will consult Angélique;" and again I saw the unwilling look on Madame La Peyre's face.

I believe it is this unwillingness of madame's that makes me care to go and see Mrs. Dayrell. What a strange feeling opposition is! but I suppose there is good in it. It is not that I want every one to agree with me—it is impossible that all can think alike—but, somehow, I generally feel in opposition to received ideas. Received ideas are so dull, and faded, and monotonous, there is nothing new or fresh in them. Besides, without opposition, there would be less power of improvement. I begin to believe that opposition is a necessity, and that without it life would be insupportable; it gives the glow and variety needful to existence. One sees this, even in such a thing as a Devonshire brook; if there were not those lumps of granite to fight, and struggle, and foam against, the water would grow dull from mere sluggishness; instead of which, it gets rid of weeds and other stray visitors, as it fights and dashes itself against the stones, and comes out brighter and clearer from the foam.

But I had the prudence to await Angélique's counsel, and when she came downstairs and heard Madame La Peyre's doubt, I was rewarded.

"Pourquoi non?" says Angélique, and then her cheery eyes search my face and comprehend the state of matters.

"Allons, mademoiselle; madame will like to see you as soon as she has rested a little. It is wonderful to see the change in madame," she says to her mistress; "even the voice of our poor madame is stronger. I have not seen her look so happy since she has come here."

CHAPTER XXXI.

MRS. DAYRELL'S ADVICE.

I was not allowed to see Mrs. Dayrell that day or the next—not till she had had another long talk with Mr. Howard. Madame La Peyre and I were out walking when he came, and I was not sorry to miss him. I was surprised to see the change in the invalid. The feverish look had left her face, and I saw what a beautiful power hope is; the haughty curl had unloosed from her mouth; her eyes even looked smaller and more at rest. There was impatience, however, in her voice.

"You can go now, ma mère, and do not come back while Miss Gertrude is here."

Angélique went, and then the wild blue eyes fixed on me with an eagerness that filled me with fear; there was so much consciousness in the look they gave.

"First, I am going to tell you something which will please you. Angélique says that you"—a blush flickered on her face—"little busybody that you are, have taken interest in my affairs, and you know that your friend Mr. Howard has brought me good news." She paused for breath; she had spoken faster than I had ever heard her speak before. "What do you say, Gertrude, are you ready to go back to Normandy? I am going."

I look at her in wonder; there was a strength in her voice, and a light in her eyes, which made me think she was really fit to travel—this woman who, a few days ago, seemed dying, and over whom Madame La Peyre had been shedding so many tears, and I had thought I was saying good-by to her forever.

But her words opened a prospect of escape, and took me back at once to myself.

"I should like to go back to Normandy very much." I did not know what more to say, because Mrs. Dayrell had never spoken to me of her husband.

Her lips curled with the old bitterness for a moment.

"There are some things which look best at a distance. I remember a line in an old poet I read when I was your age, Gertrude; it is full of truth:

'"Tis expectation makes a blessing dear.'

Perhaps you will find Normandy dull, child; but, at least, I have something to look forward to. I did not think life had any excitement left in it."

She paused, and a gentler, more pensive look came into her eyes. I felt relieved. I had had a mingled feeling in asking to see Mrs. Dayrell. I dreaded that Mr. Howard might have told my secret, and I did not want her to know it.

I must have looked graver than usual. I

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have felt grave and much older since my father's letter came.

"What ails you, child?" said Mrs. Dayrell, looking keenly at me; "you are dull and ill; your eyes have lost all their brightness. I believe I am the gayest of the two, after all; selfish people are always young-looking, you know; they never burden themselves with the anxieties and cares of others; but I am not wholly selfish, Gertrude—at least, not this morning. I am in harmony with the whole world just now, and happiness gives wisdom sometimes, and I want to speak to you about yourself while my wise mood lasts. Sit down. I never can speak while you stand ready to run away."

For an instant I thought I would run away. I knew by instinct what was coming, and I could not trust myself to talk of that to Mrs. Dayrell. Madame La Peyre's gentleness and courtesy, and perhaps a certain reverence I felt for her, kept me somewhat in check, even about Captain Brand, and, although Angélique was only a servant, there was an indescribable power in her which enforced self-control on me; but with Mrs. Dayrell I felt no outward help; in her presence all the lawless, rebellious part of my nature stirred—nothing in her appealed to my reverence—only the simple fear of doing her harm by agitation had more than once kept me from open disagreement with her.

I sat down when my brief struggle was over, and she began:

"Mr. Howard has told me about your voyage home, Gertrude. I suppose you had been warned against confiding in me; but you might have trusted me. I have half a mind to be angry that you have not told me what it seems even Angélique knows—I mean your marriage."

She waited a little before she said these last words.

I hardly felt angry. A circle was closing round me; a feeling, more like despair than anger, whispered, "You will not free yourself."

"I have not told any one," I said, coldly. "Madame La Peyre told Angélique."

I did not look at Mrs. Dayrell, but I felt that her eyes were still fixed on me.

"My poor child!" she said, softly. "And yet I am the confidante you should have chosen."

I opened my eyes in surprise, and she flushed.

"Not because I am good or prudent, but because I can sympathize with your feeling, with your independence, and your self-will. You and I are strong on the wing, Gertrude; and such birds pine in any cage."

There was such a touch of sympathy in her voice that I glanced at her quickly. She held out her thin hand; and I saw real affection in her eyes. Even at that moment I wondered how it got there; it did not seem in harmony with the rest of the haughty, hectic face.

"I had nothing to confide," I said. "I was only unhappy, and I did not want to talk about it to any one."

"There is no use in talking to those who cannot understand your feelings. Madame La Peyre and Angélique are good—good as possible; but, remember, they have never known love, and so they cannot sympathize. There are a great many things, Gertrude, which may be guessed at, imagined, and so on; but no one knows any thing about love who has not felt it."

Her eyes were searching my face so inquiringly that the cold apathy left me. I felt a warm glow rush over me, and I knew that it showed on my cheeks.

"Now, child, do not harden yourself," she went on, pleadingly—"now that all the first difficulties of your confession are taken out of your way, tell me why you are unhappy. Is this husband ugly, or stern, or foolish, or what is the objection? Or do you wish to remain unmarried?"

I thought the last question sounded mocking.

"Yes, while I am so young, I am not fit to be married," I said, stubbornly. And then I saw that Mrs. Dayrell had spoken truly when she said she understood me.

She only stroked my hand as it lay on the bed, and she said:

"Yes; I told you I could feel for you. It was very hard to tie you up before you had seen the world. It was a great mistake."

"You must not blame my brothers," I said, hastily, and then stopped, checked by the remembrance that I had done this myself.

Here there came a pause, and I begin to consider. I do not think this is the kind of sympathy that will help me. "Seeing the world" cannot make any difference in love. Eugène is almost the first man of my own

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age I have spoken to, and I loved him almost at once. I do not believe in a love which can keep itself ungiven till it has the counsel of worldly experience to guide its choice.

"Perhaps I mean that I prefer to choose for myself, and"—I looked instinctively round, but the words came out in spite of the reserve I wanted to keep up—"I will not have a husband unless I can love him."

I felt my eyes flash. As she will talk on this unpleasant subject, it is best to let her know at once that my mind is made up. She is safe; she will not reveal confidence, I feel sure.

"But, Gertrude, this comes to exactly what I was saying. As you do not bring either of the objections I name against your husband, your unhappiness is to be cured; and I am going to tell you how."

A sudden rush of hope warmed me. I clasped her thin hand between mine.

"Can you tell me what it is? but be sure you do not mistake."

I saw Mrs. Dayrell start and flush, and my voice sounded very strange to myself. When I was a child, I was taken once to Government House to see a play; and the lady who acted the heroine spoke in that strained voice at the end.

She did not answer at once. She drew her hand away quietly, and put it over her eyes to shade them while she looked at me.

"I will not mistake purposely. But, Gertrude, you puzzle me; you are so changed. Tell me, have you seen this husband since you came here?"

I bent my head.

"Ah! I noticed that you did not come to me; and that Madame La Peyre was quiet, and oppressed. Poor Eugénie! she cannot keep a secret thoroughly; the restraint is more than she can bear. But now listen, child. There is no use in seeing this husband every now and then, and all the while keeping up a feeling of dislike. Do as I tell you. Ask him to keep away for a year or so; and, by the time he comes back, if you have no personal prejudice against him, you will be able to love him."

If I did not love already, I must believe her, she is so earnest; but I cannot.

"I can never, never do that," I say, in a passion of misery; "it is too late."

As those wide, wondering blue eyes meet mine, I see that I have betrayed myself, and I bury my face on Mrs. Dayrell's pillow.

There is a long silence. At last I leave off thinking of my own misery, for a sudden thought has come to me that perhaps Mrs. Dayrell has fainted.

No. She is lying quietly; but there is a look of deep thought in her eyes.

"Gertrude," she says, softly, "that Mr. Howard must be a good man. I believe he has been of more use than the doctor has. All these months I have been longing for peace. I have lived in a perpetual hopeless struggle with myself and with every one. I cannot, even now, say which is the real condition of my mind. Very possibly" (she laughed, as if she were trying to make light of her own seriousness) "by to-morrow I may have gone back to the old state again, and talk to you as I used to. But to-day I seem to see life with more calmness and hope than I ever thought to do, and I feel able to comfort you, child. I think that you have been dealt with unwisely—unfairly even—but it is done, and you should try to make the best of what has happened. You cannot free yourself, but you can make your lot much harder. That which now seems to you necessary to your happiness, and an eternal obstacle between you and your husband, may be only an unreal fancy. Child" (her face flushed suddenly, and she held my hand firmly in hers), "I can speak to you out of real experience—not out of a maxim-book of things as they should be. You love; but it may be that your love is not placed worthily—that it is only trifled with; it may be, too—and from all Mr. Howard told me I think it is—that you have been married to an admirable husband; one who will make you happy, spite of yourself, and yet you cannot see his good qualities because of the prejudice created by your marriage. Well, Gertrude, take this warning—happiness is no easy thing to get; and, as I lie here, I see that our own way and our own efforts do not bring it, and we may tear in pieces and fling away our real life while we strive to have our own will in what is simply impossible. Do not throw away the substance for the shadow."

I listened in wonder; this was very different talk from that which troubled me so when Captain Brand came.

"Thank you; you are very kind" (I drew my hand away); "but you are quite mistaken

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about me. If I were to try even to love Captain Brand, I should commit a great sin, and something dreadful might happen. Do not ask me."

"Why will you not trust me?" she said, impatiently; "you are so young that you are capable of deceiving yourself, and of being deceived. Who is this person you prefer to your husband?"

I cannot sit still and be questioned about Eugène. I start up angrily.

"I cannot tell you; besides, no one can help me but myself, and I do not want to trouble any one."

I almost ran to the door, and got away before she could speak again.

CHAPTER XXXII.

AT CHÂTEAU-FONTAINE.

We have been a week at Château-Fontaine, and the life of Merdon begins to seem far off and unsubstantial.

I was so very impatient to get away, that, at last, I counted the hours; and then I was so anxious to be at Château-Fontaine again, that our slow rate of journeying was very tiresome.

But the doctor said Mrs. Dayrell was scarcely fit to travel at all; and, indeed, spite of our slow progress, she has been quite ill ever since our arrival, and is still too tired to see any one. I am glad not to see her yet; I want to wipe out of my memory all that happened in those last miserable days—Frank Newton's mistake and Mr. Donald's folly; for, although I am still miserable about it for his sake, it was very foolish of him to misunderstand me; and then my father's letter; and then, worst of all, Mr. Howard, and the certainty that my marriage will be known and spoken of. Whenever this remembrance comes it brings such a sharp torture, that I could almost jump into the Seine to get away from it.

It comes now, and I scamper down-stairs, in the hope of meeting with some distraction.

I wrote to Eugène—dear, dear Eugène, how sweet it is to be in your country again!—about a week before we left Merdon, and told him we were coming here. Will he come, and if he does come what will happen? I have resolved to tell him at once about my marriage, and he will advise me. I cannot tell him in a letter, he might be angry and think I had deceived him. I am sure it is better to tell it than to write; what advice will he give?

If he were to ask me to marry him in spite of every thing, I wonder if I could ever be his wife? But Eugène is so clever, he will manage it somehow. I trust all to him. I have been trying to find out where the abbé is; but madame does not seem to know. Her whole anxiety now is how to find Mr. Dayrell, and bring him back to his wife. Poor thing! if he comes soon I believe she will recover; it would be dreadful if she had undergone all this fatigue for a false hope.

As I come down-stairs—not that little spiral staircase; I have a nice, pretty room on the same floor as the *salon* now—I meet Rosalie half-way. She was very civil to me the day after our arrival; but I cannot conquer my dislike.

"Aha!"—she grins in such a disagreeable way—"mademoiselle has her hat, she is going out early again."

I nod, and pass on. Why does Rosalie watch me? What business is it of hers whether I go out early or late? I believe it is because her freckles and her light eyelashes remind me of a horrid story I once read, that after I leave her I shudder, and wish that she were not at Château-Fontaine.

I peep into the abbé's room—I am to use it as my study—there is a bright fire there. Madame La Peyre talks of getting a professor to come over from Rouen and give me lessons, and I think I shall like this. I am sure I like the plan of having this dear little room all to myself. What long letters I shall write to Eugène!

I have been out very little since I came, there has been so much rain and sleet; but I have renewed acquaintance with much that I saw before. To-day I mean to row myself in that dear little boat, or, at least, to sit in it.

Just outside the door, at the top of the double flight of steps, I meet Matthieu face to face.

I like Matthieu—he is so civil, and he was overpowered with joy when we all arrived at Château-Fontaine. He smiles now in a most delighted fashion.

"Is there something I can do for mam-

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zelle? Will mamzelle tell me if she wants any thing?" He stands staring, with his mouth open.

"No, thank you;" and then I pass on into the winding path through the shrubbery.

Instead of going round to the back of the château, and down to the river, through the hanging wood, I believe it is quickest to go instead to the place where Eugène landed me, near the *concierge's* cottage.

The old walnut-faced *concierge* is sitting at his door, smoking, and just within the cottage I see a nice-looking young woman nursing a baby—but I pretend not to see. I take a long curve across the grass, which carries me well beyond the cottage, with its staring white walls and green shutters, and find myself at our landing-place under the tall trees. How different it all looks! That charming, green-suffused atmosphere has vanished with the leaves; there is a low, leaden-colored sky, and the wind cries and rattles among the bare boughs overhead; the plank is there, but it is useless now, for the little thread-like stream has trebled itself in width. It is all so changed, that I am chilled and troubled. The glow of delight which any thought of Eugène brings is checked for the first time since I came here. In the *salon*, in his study, even in the room, where we did not speak to one another—I seem to have been living with him; and this morning, when I saw, at last, a chance of getting down to the river, I believe I almost expected that he would suddenly appear beside me. I seem to care so much more for him than I did at Merdon.

But this chill destroys the illusion. It is so long since I heard from Eugène, that something may have happened. He may not be in Paris; he may have gone away traveling—but then he would have told me so. Did not I write to him as soon as our journey to Normandy was decided? Ah! my heart grows more troubled, and my hope is fainter; there is no longer the upspringing life in it which seems to bear me above doubt and fear. Has he forgotten me, and will he never write to me? I shall go on, day after day, waiting and expecting, like the poor, forsaken heroine of a novel.

I feel so miserable that I shiver with cold; and yet I have wrapped a warm shawl round my shoulders. I turn abruptly from the river, and walk briskly toward the gate. I have not been down into the village. Angélique has promised to take me, as soon as she is less necessary to poor Mrs. Dayrell; but I have not seen Angélique for two whole days. I fancy Rosalie keeps us apart. She answers the bell. She seems to inhabit the staircase. I am always meeting her.

I look lingeringly down the steep road. A little dark-eyed boy is loitering just outside the gate, picking up small twigs which have fallen from the trees. He is startled when he sees me, and turns to go back to his village.

I call to him as he reaches a turn in the road; from this point it goes down, straight and steep, and the boy must have a full view of any thing coming up it.

"Can you see the postman coming?"

He turns round, sharply.

"The postman! *Mais oui*—there he is; he will soon have reached the château."

He points his brown finger beyond where I stand, and, as I look back into the park, I see a man hurrying along under the trees on the opposite side of the *concierge's* cottage. He is going very fast, for he takes long striding steps; I feel sure he has a letter for me, and I go back as fast as I can.

I cannot overtake him. He has already reached the winding-in-and-out paths among the shrubs, and I lose sight of him.

All at once I remember the steep, slippery grassed hill, and I make for that. It is not slippery now as it was in summer-time; the ground is sticky, but I get along fast. When I reach the terrace, there is no one in sight. I am breathless with the haste I have made, and I stand panting. A moment after, the postman emerges from the mass of shrubs, on his way to the house.

I stop him by a gesture, and he raises his cap.

"Have you a letter for Miss Gertrude Stewart?"

I speak with dignity, though my voice comes with a gasp. I will not take this postman into confidence; I suffered enough with old Samuel.

The postman looks through his letters. There is only one for the château, and that is for Madame La Peyre.

He passes on, and I stand there sadly enough. Was my foreboding true—and has Eugène forgotten me? No; I must not

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wrong him by even a doubting thought. He will not write—he will come—he is coming. I clasp my hands over my eyes to keep in this hope. I may have stood thus for some minutes. A shrill titter rouses me, and I draw my hands away. Rosalie stands facing me; so close, that her freckled forehead is within a few inches of mine; her green eyes look more malicious than ever.

"Aha! mamzelle has then seen our postman? And what does she think of him?"

CHAPTER XXXIII.

MADAME LA PEYRE'S MYSTERY.

It snows so heavily this morning, that there is not a chance of going out. But I am so happy to be in France again, that this weather does not depress me as it would at Merdon. Madame La Peyre says the château is only half the size it was before the revolution; but it seems very large to me—it is such a quaint, queer, rambling place. I have discovered another of those spiral stone staircases; so there are three—that one which led down from my bedroom, when I was here before, and that one behind the bookcase in Eugène's study. I have gone into that study several times, but I cannot find the spring. It is difficult to believe there is a door, the books look so even and regular; and I cannot inquire of Madame La Peyre, she will ask so many questions, and perhaps the whole story of Eugène will come out. I could never, never tell that to any one; not because I like secrets, but it seems to me that our love is too sacred a thing to talk of.

We have gone back to French habits here, and I seldom see Madame La Peyre till the mid-day meal, which they call breakfast.

I do not feel quite so happy as usual this morning. My sleep last night was haunted by a vision of Rosalie. I dreamed that she came into the *salle* when we were all seated at dinner, and read aloud a letter from Eugène. I woke up in terror, and then fell asleep again to dream that Eugène was married.

I was glad to see the snow when I looked out of window. I did not wish to go out; and yet I shrank from another encounter with Rosalie. My feeling toward this woman is perhaps unreal and exaggerated—the result of the lonely life of these last days; but she makes me uncomfortable. Directly she comes into the room, it seems as if she changed the atmosphere by her presence. I feel sure she would do me a mischief if she could.

Madame La Peyre has so much to see after on her return from this long absence from the château, that some time will pass before she can fulfill her promise of taking me into the village.

I miss the dear little church at Merdon. I did not like Mr. Tracey's sermons, but it was nice to have a church to go to. I go to the little village church here. But then I feel a heretic when I am in it.

The old piano-forte has not improved in my absence, but it is better than nothing; and I sit singing till Madame La Peyre sends to tell me breakfast is served.

Rosalie grins as she opens the saloon-door to let me pass out. I do not think she could smile if she tried—there is something cold and horrible in her face: as I look at her now, I see decided spitefulness in her eyes.

I am so disposed to quarrel with her, that the only safety is in silence.

"Mamzelle is too late," she says, in a teasing, jeering way.

"Too late for what? Is not madame at breakfast?"

"But pardon, that is exactly what she is doing, and she waits for mamzelle. It is the postman for whom mamzelle is too late this morning."

I try to look unmoved, but it is useless. Rosalie's hateful face stirs all the blood in my body. I turn my face away from her peering gray eyes.

"Mamzelle has then chosen the wrong day; the postman has brought nothing yesterday, and to-day he has brought two letters, and madame has them."

I hurry down-stairs with a desperate fear at my heart. At the door of the eating-room I pause for reflection.

Why should I be so frightened; even if the letter is from Eugène, madame will not read it, and I am not obliged to show it to her. Already she guesses that I care for him, but at present she need not know how much; she and Rosalie are quite different. Madame La Peyre would never be unkind or betray me to Captain Brand. I will let things take their course; I will be quite

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open, I will have no more secrets, and then Rosalie cannot spy on me.

Madame gave me an arch look when I went in; but Angélique stood beside her.

"Why, where do you hide yourself, Angélique?" I said. "I have scarcely seen you since we have been here. How is Mrs. Dayrell?"

"She is better, and she wishes to see mademoiselle; but mademoiselle will not let her talk much"—Angélique gave me a glance full of warning—"she is so weak that she should hardly speak at all."

"You had better stay in the room then, you dear old fidget, and regulate the number of words we speak."

Angélique smiled in that grave fashion in which I always feel a reproof.

"It is," she went on, as if speaking to herself, "that my poor madame is so full of expectation that she cannot rest or sleep with enjoyment, and every little thing which excites her makes her so tired."

"But have you not any fresh news?" I looked from Angélique to Madame La Peyre.

"Not yet; but, Gertrude"—she touched one of the letters on the table—"I have at length news from my brother the abbé, and he promises to take means and find out Henri and to bring him to Barbara, and when the Père Alphonse undertakes to do any thing it will be done if it is possible."

"Then we shall soon see Monsieur l'Abbé?" I felt in a glow of delight.

"Yes, I hope so. Why, how pleased you look!" she smiled. "I must tell him what a friend he has in you; but I have another pleasure in store for you, my child—a surprise."

Madame and Angélique were looking anxiously at me, and then Madame La Peyre's eyes turned to the other letter which lay before her.

I make an effort to speak coolly. I have come to a crisis, and I must get through it the best way I can; no one here has any real control over me.

"Is that letter for me, madame?" What an absurd organ is a voice!—why cannot it be the same under all circumstances—why must shyness or agitation of any kind make it hoarse and rough? I hear the sound myself; no wonder they look at me with deepened interest.

"Did you, then, expect a letter?" says madame; there is such a provoking consciousness in her face. If she were a safe confidante, and if she were alone, perhaps I could confess all to Madame La Peyre; but Angélique must never know about my correspondence with Eugène. I cannot lose her good opinion. I fear she has never thought so well of me since I told her about Mr. Donald.

Madame gets tired of waiting for an answer, so she goes on speaking: "Perhaps the letter should be for you; but you must forgive the writer. He had to ask my permission to come here, and he may have wished to take you by surprise; but then young men and old women do not always judge alike."

I wish Madame La Peyre would speak out. Is it Eugène who is coming? Oh, yes, it can be no one else. I yield to the dear certainty, and turn away to hide my face.

Now the secret of his silence is explained. He has not written because he wishes to take me by surprise; my heart beats so fast that I cannot speak.

"But you do not ask when your visitor is coming, my little one. I am so glad you look so well. I begin to think, Gertrude, that the air of Normandy suits you better than Devonshire did."

A sudden chill falls on me. Why does madame speak of Devonshire? Does she mean Frank Newton? And yet she knows nothing. Mrs. Dayrell's illness absorbed us all so much, and after that the preparations for departure, that I never had need or opportunity to tell Madame La Peyre of Frank Newton's message, or about Mr. Donald.

I believe there was no need, for Mr. Newton left his card a day or two afterward, to inquire for Mrs. Dayrell, and to say that he was going to travel. Is he traveling in Normandy, and is he coming to ask me to marry him?

"Who is this visitor, madame?" I say, impatiently. "I do not want visitors; unless, indeed, it is your brother."

"My brother will come all in good time"—she laughs, in her soft, pleasant way; but I cannot even smile, every nerve is tingling with impatience—"but I do not understand you, Gertrude, you are so changeable; just now you looked so pleased, as if you guessed at your visitor, and I was glad to see you look

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happy, my child; but now there is a cloud on your face. What makes you so whimsical, little one?"

All this while Angélique has kept silence; now she takes a dish of fish, and hands it to me. They are little fish, fastened in a bundle, and I do not like them; but I feel embarrassed, so I take some on my plate.

"I am hungry, I suppose, madame." Having said this, I feel bound to eat the nasty little fish.

I glance up suddenly. Angélique is looking at Madame La Peyre in a very deprecating manner.

"I will go and see how madame is," she says; "and then I will come back for mademoiselle."

Madame La Peyre places the letter before me; but she is certainly very childish, she put it face downward.

"You would not guess before Angélique, Gertrude, but you might have trusted her. I tell La Mère Angélique all my secrets. Now I shall leave you to read the letter by yourself. I must go and give orders to Rosalie to prepare a room."

I waited till she had gone, and then I turned the letter over with a shrinking dislike; something in her last words had taken away all hope, and had told me the truth.

Yes, there was the clear, firm handwriting I expected to see, and, when I opened the letter, the signature "George Brand." I am caught in a trap. I had decided to write to Captain Brand, and tell him the truth; but, then, I wanted first to see Eugène again, and learn from him how I was to act; and, if Captain Brand had waited a little longer, I should have seen Eugène and told him the whole truth, as I can never write it, and I should have known what to do. There is no time now, and I cannot write to Eugène till he has told me where to send a letter. He has left Paris by this time.

The only hope is that he is on his way here with the abbé. Something may delay Captain Brand. If he is delayed, he will meet Eugène here; it will be terrible for me to see them together, but it must bring about my freedom. I have never acknowledged Captain Brand as my husband. There is no sin in my love for Eugène.

I read the letter, and put it down with a troubled face.

He will come to-day. He says it so positively, and I see that he cares more for me than I thought he did. I seem to be constantly in his thoughts. It is foolish to himself, and very tormenting to me, that we should meet again. I am rejoiced to see that he can only stay three days; I shall get away from him as much as possible, and, as soon as he leaves, I will write and tell him every thing.

I feel freer, more courageous here than I did at Merdon. Eugène seems nearer, partly because there is so much to remind me of him, and also because I live in a daily expectation of seeing him. I wish Madame La Peyre would let me read that dear old abbé's letter. There must be something about Eugène in it. I do not know why I called the abbé dear—he was a veritable dragon when I was here before.

"Mademoiselle!"

It is the squeaky voice of Matthieu, and he is standing looking at me with a most ridiculous expression of countenance. I am not sure that Matthieu can be said to have a countenance. I think it is rather a face with features on it; his head is on one side, his lipless mouth is wide open, making circular grooves at each corner, and his dull, leaden eyes are fixed on me with a look in them that is indescribable in its want of expression.

"What do you want?"

I begin to think I dislike French servants; there is so much more freedom in their ways than in those we are used to.

"Pardon, mademoiselle, but it is the sick lady, Madame Dayrell, who demands her. It is the Mère Angélique who has come to tell me this. Dame, I was sound asleep."

He laughed as if it were an achievement to be sound asleep so early in the afternoon, but I felt disgusted. All the women in the château worked hard; only this lazy fellow took his ease, and left his work to be done by others.

"Very well; you can go and tell Angélique I am coming."

CHAPTER XXXIV.

ON THE BRINK.

Angélique is waiting at the door. She holds it open, and then she opens another, and I find myself in a cheerful-looking square

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room, paneled in white wood, with tapestry half-way between floor and ceiling.

I do not see the bed at first, for it stands sheltered within an alcove, and is screened by muslin curtains. So I look round me. I never saw a bedroom so like a sitting-room; the floor is of some dark wood, polished and slippery, and there are just one or two little rugs: one by the bedside, and another in front of an old, yellow, brown-velvet sofa. Some of the chairs and the window-curtains are also of this sad color—it is hardly like yellow, it is more like tea-leaves, or a faded leaf, but the room is not dull-looking, the mirrors take away any sadness of aspect. There are four of them, set in old-fashioned black-and-gold frames; a quaint *armoire* also in black-and-gold, with queer, twisted pillars at the corners, and a round table with black legs and a marble top. In my room there is a marble table, but the other furniture is modern—there is none of this quaint, grave harmony there.

Angélique is wonderfully in keeping with the rest, in her close-fitting, plain black gown and apron, her snowy cap, with its broad strings, and her red-brown face and hands.

"Is it you, Gertrude?"

I start from my contemplation, and look behind the muslin curtains.

Mrs. Dayrell lies outside the bed, propped up by several pillows.

She is so very pale, so very wasted, that to me she looks worse than she did that day at Merdon, when she was thought to be dying. Her hair is bound up and rolled into a loose coil at the back of her head. Her blue eyes are still bright and eager, but the brightness is not so hard; there is a subdued look on the face, and yet the eagerness is there still.

I had forgotten much of my last talk with her—but her first words brought every thing back vividly.

"Well, my rebellious child"—she smiled kindly—"have you bowed your neck to the yoke?" I gave her an imploring look.—"Angélique," she said, "if you are so willful that you will not leave us alone together, put yourself in that window and do the part of Sister Anne—tell us when you see any one coming. You have the full command of the terrace, so you can amuse yourself to your heart's content."

There was the old scoff in her voice, but, though she spoke faintly, there was none of the difficulty of utterance I had noticed the last time I saw her.

Angélique went straight to the window, and Mrs. Dayrell's eyes followed her. Then she fixed them earnestly on my face:

"Do you remember where we left off, Gertrude?"

She said it naturally, as if our talk had just been interrupted, and we were about to take it up again; but after the first startled moment I recovered my recollectedness.

"If you please, I do not want to begin that talk again." I looked frankly at her. "Let us talk of something brighter than my troubles; why not of Mr. Dayrell?"

It was her turn to blush—a kind of strange beauty shone out of her face, and her eyes drooped like those of a young girl. There was a silence.

"Gertrude"—she spoke without looking at me—"I am about the strongest warning I could preach. You see me lying here too weak to move from my bed—too weak to be left unwatched, and yet happy at last—happy in the hope that I shall once more see my husband; and I tell you not to do as I have done. You have youth and health; give them to the man who loves you. Ah, if you knew what it is to long to have them to give!" she said, almost with a wail.

"I am not to allow you to tire yourself," I said, smiling, "so we must not argue, or I could say that you contradict now what you said at Merdon. I want you to tell me of some nice old women to go and see in the village; though we have been here five days, I have seen no one but the old *concierge*."

She shook her head at me, but she had no strength to resist.

"Perhaps old Matthieu is about as amusing as any one in Fontaine," she said, "provided you can understand his toothless talk, and can succeed in escaping when you have had enough of it. He and his son are good representatives of Frenchmen of their class. Our Matthieu here is lazy and foolish, and his father has wits enough for three *concierges*."

"Do you know Rosalie?" I lowered my voice; but I fancied that Angélique's shoulders moved at the sound of her daughter's name.

Mrs. Dayrell raised her hand in warning.

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"I know this much of her: if you offend Rosalie, she will find means to punish you for it. They think"—she looked toward Angélique—"that such a poor, half-witted creature could not do harm—and would not if she could. But I remember I thought very differently before I was married. She heard me say she was ugly one day, and I believe she has never forgiven me."

"She is hideous!"

Mrs. Dayrell smiled.

"She is just the sort of woman to be touchy about her looks. But listen!—Angélique, is there not some one coming along the drive?"

How quick her ears were! The drive ended below the winding shrubbery, and I had not heard wheels. I saw Mrs. Dayrell's fingers twitching together.

Angélique waited a little while, and then came up to the bed:

"Yes, madame; it is a carriage. But it is possibly a visitor for Miss Gertrude. I will go and see."

My heart beat fast. I wished myself in the wood beyond the river. It would not be easy for Captain Brand to find me there.

Mrs. Dayrell lay still, with closed eyelids. Her suspense was so supreme that I doubt if she understood the meaning of Angélique's words.

As I stood watching her I felt selfish and ashamed of myself. I had forgotten her anxiety in my own. Here was a woman seemingly at the end of her life, who, for months, for years perhaps, had been unhappy through her own fault; and now she was waiting for the only happiness she cared for—the sight of her husband; and also for the opportunity of owning her fault—for I guessed that she had repented her willfulness, whatever it might be.

"And she may die before he comes, broken-hearted by her long waiting," I said to myself.

"Gertrude!"—I started, for I had forgotten how near she was—"if this visitor should be your husband, I wish to see him."

She smiled at my dismay. I suppose it was very visible.

"I shall do no mischief, child. Good, rather, I think. Why, Gertrude, when Henri arrives, I shall want you to be friends with him."

It was a relief to see the door open.

It was Angélique; but I saw in her face that the visitor was not Captain Brand.

"It is only Monsieur and Madame Dupont from Saint-Antoine; but madame wishes to present mademoiselle to them."

"It is nothing but a *ruse* of yours, you tiresome old woman," says her patient.—"And I believe, Gertrude, you are as anxious to get away as *la mère* is to take you I suppose it is vexatious to be cooped up with an invalid."

I try to interrupt her; I am ready to cry at her accusation, but she points to the door. I catch her hand as it drops on the bed, and kiss it.

"You know it is not vexatious," I say, vehemently. And then Angélique touches my arm, and I hurry away.

The grave nurse stops outside the door.

"Ma'm'selle does not keep her promise. My poor madame will have so feverish a night, and it will be the fault of mademoiselle."

"Well, I can't help it, Angélique. Your madame teases me, and then I forget prudence. I dare say she provokes you sometimes."

Angélique's grave smile is on her lips.

"I am only a nurse, and mademoiselle knows a nurse would not be much use who thought of her own feelings instead of her patient. But, though madame is not the patient of mademoiselle, I must ask mademoiselle to think only of her whenever she sees her."

She left me abruptly; she had never spoken so boldly before, and I felt very much ashamed of my irritation.

"It is very troublesome to have to go and see these people," I say crossly to myself, as I open the *salon*-door—the dread of seeing Captain Brand, and the longing to put off our meeting as long as possible, have made me very excited this morning.

The sight of the visitors is soothing; they look very comic. Madame La Peyre is sitting in a stiff, high-backed chair, full of smiles and graciousness, and her visitors sit opposite—the lady very upright, with an old-fashioned bonnet, and a drab-colored umbrella lined with brown; the gentleman in a very close-fitting blue coat and drab gaiters. I thought French people dressed well and fashionably; these look as if they had come out of an old-fashioned picture; the lady's shawl

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is put on very well, and the colors of her dress go well with her bonnet; but, these points excepted, she is very like one of the old-fashioned farmers' wives who used to go to Merdon Church. She has a flat face, with a straight, salient nose, and large, pale-blue eyes—not so much a stupid face as a face through which expression has filtered, but which is powerless to retain any. As the door opens and I come in, her eyes move slightly and then return to a fixed gaze at Madame La Peyre. But the gentleman sitting beside her jumps up, takes the handle of the door from me, makes me a bow, gives me a chair, and then seats himself with a glibness which dazzles my observation; however, I see enough to make out that he is a small man, with a lean, hatchet-shaped face, and a black beard; he has a yellow skin, and his small, restless, twinkling black eyes are forever moving.

"Mademoiselle is from Australia," he says, very politely; "does she find Normandy to her taste?"

I say I like Normandy, and then I ask if monsieur has ever been in England.

"But no—" he shrugs his shoulders, and droops the corners of his mouth—"but Madame Dupont has been there; yes, she has seen London, and the Abbey of Westminster, and the lord-mayor; she has seen all that is to be seen in England."

While he speaks he nods and looks at his wife, as if she were a huge wax doll and he were showman, and at the end he rubs his hands contentedly, and looks at me.

I smile.

"Madame has seen more than I have. I only know a small country-village in England."

"*Tiens*, but this is extraordinary.—Do you hear this, Madame Dupont?"

I observe that madame's eyes travel to my face, and then go back again to Madame La Peyre.

"You will have visitors, madame, in a little while," Monsieur Dupont says.

Madame La Peyre gives a little nervous start, but she smiles and says: "Yes, I expect my brother, the abbé."

"Ah, and he brings a visitor." I feel my face is burning and tingling, and I see madame's hand trembling as it lies so white and soft on the arm of her chair, and yet one or the other of us is suffering all this agitation for nothing, for he may either mean Mr. Dayrell or Eugène.

Madame La Peyre looks inquiringly.

Madame Dupont's eyes rest calmly on her small, restless spouse.

"My sister says that Monsieur de Vaucresson has told her that he is going to see some friends at Château-Fontaine, but she does not speak of the abbé—my friend"—and then she once more settles her blue eyes on her hostess.

I can see trouble and disappointment in the face of Madame La Peyre, and yet she goes on smiling at her visitors.

The cloud that weighed so heavily over me has suddenly lifted. I should like to sing, and dance, and laugh out loudly, to get rid, in some outward way, of the joy that is almost choking me.

That stiff, flat-faced woman is transformed—I feel quite friendly toward her.

"Yes, yes," her husband says, "it is Monsieur de Vaucresson; and I hope, madame, that, when you do us the honor of coming to Saint-Antoine, you will bring Monsieur le Comte—he is a fine young man, I hear, and is very much admired—he ought to make a good marriage."

"His mother will take care of that." Madame Dupont's phrases are uttered like oracles.

Her husband rubs his hands and looks at her with delight; he nods his head gently.

"You hear, madame, what my wife has said, and she is never wrong, never—his mother will take care of that—has taken care of it, without doubt. Ancient families, such as the De Vaucressons, betroth children in their cradle—it would not surprise me"—he put his head on one side, and half closed his eyes—looking so consciously sagacious that I longed to pinch him—"on the contrary, I shall expect to hear that Monsieur le Comte is so betrothed."

He darted a quick glance at his wife, but she sat in placid silence—as if she listened to his remarks in tolerating pity—ready to come in and set them straight when they deviated from fact.

"I am not acquainted with the family—I only know Monsieur de Vaucresson as my brother's pupil," said Madame La Peyre, with a change of voice which told me that the subject was distasteful to her. "But, madame, how are the cows and the poultry?"

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This question seemed to rouse Madame Dupont. The calves had prospered, she said, but the poultry had failed; and, while she was bending forward to Madame La Peyre to advise her to feed laying hens on snails, I heard a distant sound of wheels.

This is undoubtedly Captain Brand, and yet I cannot escape. Monsieur Dupont has just begun to cross-question me about Australia, which he evidently confounds with California. I make helpless efforts to enlighten him; but I am first hot and then cold; I do not know what I am saying.

"No horses!"—Monsieur Dupont's eyebrows are like the arches of a bridge—"but this is, indeed, a strange piece of natural history, which I will communicate to Madame Dupont when she has ended with the chickens; but it is singular that there are no horses in Australia."

I try feebly to contradict this assertion; the room is going round, I think, for I hear an arrival below, and I know that Captain Brand is coming up-stairs.

CHAPTER XXXV

AN UNWELCOME TÊTE-À-TÊTE.

It was almost horrible to feel so inclined to cry and laugh at once.

Captain Brand came up and shook my hand with such open delight in his face that all my old dislike to him came back; and that absurd Monsieur Dupont went through a pantomime of bows that was suggestive of a monkey salaming an elephant. Madame Dupont was calmly majestic. She let her eyes rest on Captain Brand's tall figure with a glance that might mean approval or patronage. If there is such a sensation as cold pleasure, I should say that it was an habitual one with this lady.

Captain Brand seated himself, and then Madame Dupont's face showed a warmer shade of interest as she turned it to Madame La Peyre.

"You will remember that the snails must be boiled," she said.

I was sitting opposite Captain Brand. He smiled; but I would not laugh; I thought, in my contradiction, that he ought not to do so, and I turned away to talk to Monsieur Dupont.

"Yes, yes, Madame Dupont knows—the chickens are gourmands," he says. "They like their food cooked, and well cooked. Yes, yes—in England, I believe, you do not care much for the cooking; you eat the meat half roasted. *Mon Dieu!* I should die of hunger"—he gave a shudder of disgust; but I was too much disturbed to be patriotic, and I did not contradict his assertion.

To my dismay, Madame Dupont rose up and gave a glance at her much lesser half.

"We must not keep the horse, my friend; he takes cold easily, and we have far to go. We hope that Madame La Peyre will do us the honor of returning our visit."

Monsieur Dupont looked at his wife with genuine admiration. I fancy her speech was rather an unusally long one.

"Yes, my friend, you are quite right," he said, "we must go.—Madame"—he bowed profoundly to Madame La Peyre, and then, twisting round on his heels so as to face me, he bowed again—"and mademoiselle, I present to you my homage, and I join my prayer to that of Madame Dupont, that you will honor St.-Antoine with your presence"—Monsieur Dupont looked at the captain, but there was no response in his face; and finally the little man bowed himself to the door of the *salon*, which he held open for his wife and Madame La Peyre.

I was in such terror at the idea of being left alone with Captain Brand that I went after them to the door of the *salon*, in the hope of escape.

"Stay here till I come back, Gertrude"—Madame La Peyre gave me such a winning smile, and shut the door on me.

I went back to my chair, and sat down. When I parted from Captain Brand I really liked him, and felt at ease in his society; but I was a child then. So much has happened since that I feel years older. I shrink from him much more than I did then. I believe two chief things which have caused this change in me toward him are, my father's letter, and the knowledge that I am dependent on Captain Brand.

The silence grows irksome, so irksome and unbearable that at last, in despair, I speak:

"You have come sooner than you said you would, when you were at Merdon."

I cannot look at him. I do not want to see that he is glad to see me, when I so shrink from him.

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He brings a chair near me, and sits down. "Yes, I have come sooner. I could not help it, Gertrude." He speaks so gently and quietly—so exactly as if he knew how perplexed I am. I feel wicked, and this attempt at soothing is irritating. "I felt that we must talk together over your father's letter. He says he has written to you by the same post."

He pulls out a letter, and gives it to me, and then pushes his chair a little back.

I longed to refuse to read it; but I could not show disrespect to my father before Captain Brand; and there might be a loop-hole of escape in what he had written.

Captain Brand got up and looked at the old cabinet, at the screens, and at last he went to the window, while I sat trying to take in the contents of what I was reading.

As I read, I felt indeed humiliated.

This letter must have given Captain Brand a very unworthy idea of my father; it was so unworthy of him that, when I had at last read it all through, I could neither look up nor speak.

My father had been to me the model of a true gentleman—so noble, so honorable, so courteous and refined; but this letter filled me with a terrible doubt. I only knew my father in his own home, and I had seen very little of him. What if my knowledge of him was merely ideal, and if his real nature was that which lay revealed to my wounded feelings in this letter in my hand?

The patronizing tone, the (as I thought) almost fulsome thanks for Captain Brand's kindness and care for us on board the Adelaide, and then, when he came to speak of money, the easiness with which he accepted obligation, and the interference he ventured on, filled me with shame: he actually named the sum which he considered should be placed by Captain Brand at my own disposal! I thought of his letter to me; in that he said, "he wished me to consider myself fortunate in marrying Captain Brand," and yet here he makes Captain Brand feel that I have condescended in marrying him, and that this condescension must be paid for—just as if I were to be bought by a yearly allowance. What shall I do? My lips are trembling, and I feel tears coming. No, I cannot speak to Captain Brand about that hateful allowance. I can only spend as little as possible, and pay it all back when I am free.

He comes and sits down again.

"Well, Gertrude," he says, as I give back the letter, "you have also received one?"

"Yes." I remember a few sentences of that letter, and I get crimson. "I cannot show it to you, it is quite private, and—"

"There is no need; perhaps it was not necessary to show you this, only I would not willingly keep any thing from you. Gertrude, if I understand you at all, you much value frankness and openness, and I wish to place my position quite openly before you."

I turned red with shame. Yes, frankness and openness were just the two qualities I hoped I was gifted with; my mind seemed to go into chaos; myself in theory was such a very different being from myself in practice. What a series of wretched, despicable little deceits my life had been lately! But still my anger was far more against Captain Brand than against myself; but for him deceit would not have been needed; he has caused all this, and he is responsible for it. I just bowed in answer; it would have been very difficult to meet his eyes without confusion, and he went on:

"After what you said to me on board the Eclair, I felt that, though it would have gone much against my inclination—indeed it would have been a grief to me—still, if Mr. Stewart had expressed a wish to take charge of you till I was free to do so myself, I must have sent you back to him; but you see, I hope, my dear child, that this is impossible; your father does not wish 'you to return to him.'"

I sat silent, trembling with anger and fear; those words, "take charge of you myself," had made this marriage which I would not believe in, a reality.

"You agree with me in this?"

"Yes," I said, in a sad, constrained voice, for I remembered too well how very distinct my father had been on this point in his letter to me.

"Well, then, tell me frankly, Gertrude, are you happy with Madame La Peyre? My—my dear child, consider only yourself in the matter; your happiness is more important than any thing else."

There was such a strange tone of constraint in his voice that a new hope came.

No man who loved a woman, and cared to make her his wife, could talk in this cold, matter-of-fact way about her happiness; with a few exceptions, all that I have seen of Captain Brand gives me the notion that a tire-

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some sense of duty inspires every thing he says and does. Is his feeling for me a duty also? and is he going to have me for a wife because of his promise to my mother?

"Captain Brand," I begin; a headstrong impulse to ask for my freedom has seized me.

He interrupts me at once.

"If you are happy here, my dear, I am contented to leave you. I like what I have seen of Madame La Peyre, and I believe this is a pleasant part of France; but, if you are not happy, I will either take you to my mother—I cannot place my wife with a stranger"—this is in answer to the dislike which shows at once in my face—"or there is yet another way"—he stops a minute, and I hold my breath in an intensity of expectation. Is he going to set me free? My heart beats so fast that I feel choked.

He goes on presently with a sort of effort: "I think I told you that if I take command of the ship now offered me I must be away a year or more, but—but I can give up this ship, Gertrude, and—and"—his voice faltered till it sounded weak and timid—"I can stay in England with you."

There is no need for him to be more explicit; while he speaks I look up quickly in a desperate hope of finding that I was right, and that he really is indifferent.

Ah me! the revelation in his face—there are things for which no words can be found, and even when the picture is painted in words, it may entirely fail in conveying truth.

There was a look of appeal—of earnest tenderness—which told me that he loved me.

Why did I not speak out boldly then? Five minutes before, when he stopped me, the words were on my tongue, quivering with impatience to get free; and now I felt so strong a recoil—such an intense shrinking from him—that I only longed to get away. No, nothing could make me speak to Captain Brand of our marriage, or in any way acknowledge that I consider him to be my husband.

Looking back now, I see my folly; a grain of cool common-sense would have saved me, and would have spared much pain and evil-doing. My age and my ignorance, I suppose, were some excuse, and also my selfishness, for I only thought of myself and my own feelings; but the real reason which chained my tongue into silence, which I had no power to overcome, was that I could not confess to him my love for Eugène. Even now—and I have some gray hairs, and many lines traced by thought and sorrow on my forehead, and are not thought and sorrow the great teachers of truth?—even now a warm blush rushes to my face as I think of the possibility of such a confession at that moment. I had no thought then that Captain Brand's own love for me might have softened him. I only dreaded his anger and my own shame in the avowal.

But I dared not stop to think, for fear he should read my silence wrongly.

"Oh, no! I am happy here, and I wish to stay with Madame La Peyre. I love her; she is so sweet and gentle."

He sighed.

My heart hardened suddenly; there was to me something fearfully absurd in a big, brown man like Captain Brand sighing or being in any way sentimental. I cannot—I will not go on with this talk. If Madame La Peyre does not come in two minutes, I shall go away.

As I set this down in my diary, I wonder if there are people in the *world*—I do not know what the world is, unless it is the people one sees in railways, and that I caught a vision of in the streets of Havre and London, and that I used to see and hear of in Hobart Town. The world—what is it? Every one talks of it; some people try to do what it thinks right. My old nurse used to say that it was good not to do as the world did, so it must be something—it must be real; but for this I should be inclined to think it was all talk, and that just the few people one's life brings each one in contact with must be each one's world; but then the Catechism says, "Renounce the pomps and vanities of this world." Now, except Rosalie, who I am sure is not good, there is no one wicked in my world.

To go back to my wonderings. Are there people in the world who are always consistent—who always act as they plan to act beforehand—or is it only I who am so miserably weak and impulsive that I am sure to have something to be sorry for afterward whenever I have been called on to act for myself? It was just the same when I was going to consult Mr. Donald; if I had acted out the quiet, calm behavior I had prescribed to myself, he would never have said he loved me; if, when

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I am with Captain Brand, I could be always cold and dignified, instead of growing quite friendly with him, as at Merdon, or, as I am to-day, so conscious and frightened that he treats me like a child, he would before this have understood my aversion, and he would altogether dislike the idea of making me his wife. What is there in him that always checks me and makes me act against my own will?

He has gone to the window again, and stands fidgeting with the great clumsy bolt, so I have time to recover myself.

I see now that that was a mischievous impulse that seized me to speak openly. I believe it was prompted by Captain Brand's belief in my frankness, in my foolish vanity, for I begin to see that this weak desire to be justified in the opinion of others is vanity. I was going to tell him every thing, and put myself completely at his mercy, just to show that I can be frank. Ah! my father did me a cruel injury when he wrote that letter; I cannot feel free and independent with Captain Brand as I felt at Merdon; I am like a captive in his presence, and he holds the end of my chain.

"Do you know when the abbé and—and his pupil are to return to Château-Fontaine?" He said this so abruptly, without even turning round, that I started, and then I felt angry. This is the first time that Captain Brand has spoken to me of Eugène.

"This is not their home; they live in Paris."

I think I have spoken for once with dignity, and I hope he has perceived it, for he keeps silence again. A nice, lively sort of husband he will make whenever he really gets a wife; silence, staring, and sighing, seem to be his ways of proceeding; and, at first, with me he used to try scolding, until he found I would not submit to be lectured.

All at once he comes close up to me, and says, very gently:

"Won't you sing me a song, Gertrude? It gives me such pleasure to listen to you. I often think of your songs."

Why does not this man take the trouble to understand me? I can see through him easily enough; but he is denser than I thought if he supposes I can sing when my heart has been jumping in and out of my throat all through this miserable half-hour.

Away flies my calm dignity again.

"I can't sing," I say, pettishly; "I have not a bit of voice. I have been talking all the morning, first with Mrs. Dayrell, and then with those French people, and — and I am quite hoarse."

Captain Brand stands quietly before me, studying my face. Presently he says, in the calmest way:

"Never mind now, then, but I must have a song by-and-by. Suppose we go and find Madame La Peyre?"

I was careful not to look up. I should have shown such lively gratitude at my release, and Captain Brand is so undiscerning, that he might have thought I was pleased with him.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

FOUND OUT.

"Only two days more," I said next morning while I dressed myself, "and then I shall say my last good-by to Captain Brand. I will write to him directly I have seen Eugène, and tell him never to come near me again."

I smile at myself in the glass. If Madame La Peyre takes possession of him as she did yesterday, these two days will pass over easily. I suppose they were talking business, but they went about like a pair of lovers.

I was so glad to be free even of dear Madame La Peyre. While it lasted, that uncomfortable talk with Captain Brand made me forget Madame Dupont's news; but it soon came back, and I went to bed with it as my last thought, and this morning woke with that glad sensation of coming joy which reality rarely equals.

There will certainly be a letter from Eugène this morning. He would not take me by surprise; besides, she would not rob me of the pleasure of watching and waiting for him.

I am tempted to go down to the gate this morning, and then the dread of meeting Captain Brand and getting into another *tête-à-tête* checks me. No; I will abide by the resolution I made yesterday. I will have no more deceit. If there is a letter, let it come openly; Madame La Peyre will give it to me, and I can tell her as much as I choose, but I will have no more underhand dealings.

Somehow, I will keep in my thoughts Captain Brand. I was not altogether absorbed yesterday; and his manner toward

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Madame La Peyre and toward the Curé of Fontaine, who came up to dine at the château, drew my attention toward him. I have felt a strange power in him before now; but I have never before been able to isolate myself so as to study him quietly when he is with others. People say two things as if they were facts: one is, that a woman always knows when a man is in love with her; and the other, that love takes away a man's wits. I believe both these sayings in the case of Captain Brand. I do not think I am silly enough to fancy a man in love with me when he is not. I can cite Mr. Newton and Mr. Donald as proofs of this; and the very trouble with which I have tried to convince myself of Captain Brand's indifference might show me that I believe in my heart that he loves me. I know it now, beyond a doubt—that look yesterday was convincing; I feel angry when I recall it. The other saying stands on even stronger ground. I understand now why I dislike so much to have to talk alone with Captain Brand, and why I shrink from telling him the truth. His manner toward other people is quite different from his manner toward me; he is never hesitating or constrained. I could not have called him gentle yesterday, when he was correcting that poor old curé's ideas about England and the English, he was so decided in contradicting. He gives me the idea of being powerful, very brave, very capable, essentially strong-minded, and determined.

While I sat watching him I trembled. I felt that if I were to say, "Captain Brand, I can never be your wife—I do not love you well enough," he would perhaps not be angry with me, because I really think it would pain him to grieve me; but all his hesitating gentleness would vanish; he would look at me in that masterful way he had on board the Adelaide, that he had always till I got to Merdon, and say, "Never mind, my dear child; don't trouble yourself about that, it will all come right; when I come back from this voyage it will be time enough for you to begin to love me."

With such a character, frankness and candor would be thrown away. Now I see why books say that women manage men so much more than men manage women. A certain amount of deceit is forced on them by the stubbornness of men.

On the whole, I really do think more highly of Captain Brand than I did before he came here—or, rather, I think I have gone back to my old idea of him at the time of the shipwreck, being encouraged to this by the behavior of others. Madame La Peyre and the curé were consulting him all dinner-time about Château-Fontaine and the management of some troublesome villagers, and about damp, and various other things, and he seemed to understand every thing, and I felt that if he were only not Captain Brand, I should be proud of him—he seemed just the friend I wanted—a sort of rock to cling to in my perplexity.

I can now understand my dear mother's liking for him, only she forgot that a man may have all the qualities necessary to inspire esteem and yet not be one bit lovable. As a friend, I could like Captain Brand very much; as a husband, I should simply hate him.

I always think much of any one who gives me new ideas. Angélique does this. I believe I have learned more from her about myself than I ever knew before. She has taught me to think, and not only to dream on in a wandering fashion; but yesterday, while I sat listening to Captain Brand, I realized that he looks at life as something we are answerable for, and evidently he thinks that his time and all that he has belong to other people more than to himself. I never thought of this before, and when I get time I shall see if it applies to me.

I suppose this shows that he is what is called a good man. No, oh, no, he cannot be truly good: no good, high-minded man would have taken advantage of a dying woman's fears and a young girl's grief and helplessness to marry her without being quite sure that she willed it. When I recall all this, I wonder at my own civility to Captain Brand. If I had not been a coward I should show him openly my abhorrence of his conduct.

This feeling has nothing to do with Eugène. I had it before I ever saw him.

Eugène! his name always makes my heart beat. I shut up my diary, and I go quickly into my little study. Rosalie is there flapping about a duster. The fire is not yet lighted.

"Mademoiselle is very early," says Rosalie, the first of all.

I do not answer. After all, I will go out. It is easy to avoid Captain Brand if I see him

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coming, and I get my book and soon reach the bottom of the winding path through the shrubberies.

I go on leisurely through the park beneath the tall trees; some of these are huge, sombre pines, so that the branches under which I pass are not all bare. The sky overhead is very pale; Morning looks as if she had not been to sleep, but had kept a cold vigil.

Under my feet the grass crackles with a pleasant, frosty sound; it scares a bright-eyed hare which was peeping timidly forward from the waste beyond. When I reach the winding water near the gate the sound of the water-fall is hushed, and I see that the stream is frozen over. I have not wrapped myself warmly, but I do not feel the cold. Such a certainty possesses me that I should soon see Eugène, that the blood is dancing in my veins.

I stop at the gate. Old Matthieu is pacing up and down there. The old man stands still, takes off his cap, and makes me a low bow. What a comical, brown, wrinkled face he has, and such great ears, with little gold rings in them!

"Mademoiselle is well this morning? Ah, yes; it is not necessary to ask it. Ma'm'selle is fresh as a rose!"

"I see there is frost," I say. I cannot think of any wiser observation. I wonder why every Frenchman thinks it necessary to pay a woman a compliment.

"Yes, yes!" He wrinkles his face and shrugs his shoulders together, till he looks like an old mummy. "Mademoiselle does not like frost, nor I either, and yet Monsieur le Curé has said to me that frost is good and to be desired, because of the roses and the fruit-trees. Frost may kill caterpillars and insects, but it is possible also to kill *concierges* by the same means when they are old, and they have rheumatism." He stoops here to rub his knees tenderly.

"Why, then, do you come out so early Matthieu?"

The wiry old figure stands erect at once, and fixes his sharp, black eyes on my face.

"Ah, mademoiselle"—he waves his wrinkled hands—"when mademoiselle is as old as I am, she will know that habit is a thing not to be overcome; it has always been my habit to move about and take the air. *Bon*, if I stay in-doors I stifle! While I was young I was at the château as my son is"—here he shrugs his shoulders again. "*Bon*, I considered it my duty to come down every morning for the letters and carry them to the house. What will you? My son likes better to save his legs, and, since I am too old and too lame to climb the hill easily, madame has said the *facteur* may mount to the château."

"And yet you come still to meet the postman?"

Matthieu nodded, and closed his sharp eyes.

"I should come whether the *facteur* comes or not—that is what I tell mademoiselle; it is not I who come, it is habit which brings me."

"You are more industrious than your son. Matthieu seems lazy."

The *concierge* looks troubled.

"I do not know," he said; "every thing changes so much, that perhaps the men and women change, too. Years ago it took three days to get to Paris, now I hear the people say you can go in a few hours; a house can be built now in a few weeks, instead of being more than a year getting ready, and yet, mademoiselle, I do not think the workmen or the servants work harder than they used to; they spend more, and they are more idle, but their days are not so long nor so happy as ours were when we were young."

"Well, Matthieu," I begin, "you see I am young, so I, of course, side with the new order of things, and"—I fancy I was going to say something wise, but I stop.

In front of me, coming up the road from the village, is Captain Brand, swinging a wet towel in his hand.

"Ah!" he smiles, brightly, "I fancied I should like to try the river this morning. What an early riser you are, Gertrude!"

He speaks so freely, and takes such an intimate tone, that I determine not to walk back to the house with him.

"Do you know Matthieu?" I say; "he is our *concierge*, and he is such a wise old man."

Captain Brand nods, and Matthieu, though he is standing bareheaded with his cap in his hand, bows reverently, as if he understood my words.

I turn to make my escape.

"Oh, please don't go away," says Captain Brand; "you seem to think I can speak French as easily as you can, and I am in great want of help."

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It is the first time that he has ever seemed to want help; he has a horrible accent, but he talked glibly enough on board the Eclair and at Havre. The wind comes rushing up the hill from the river; it is icy cold, standing there by the gate.

Captain Brand says something to Matthieu, but I cannot make out his words.

"Plait-il, monsieur," the old man says, respectfully.

"I told you so," the captain says, laughing. "You will have to interpret for me."

"I was not listening," I answer, coldly.

He does not seem at all vexed by my indifference. I dislike such extreme good temper or self-control, or whatever it is that makes him so masterful. I believe nothing I could ever say or do could enrage Captain Brand.

He repeats his question, and I pass it on to Matthieu.

"Ah, but no;" the wrinkled, brown face smiles and bows to both of us, and the gold rings in his ears shake and glitter.

"Monsieur et madame, it is not damp in the park; it is damp only inside the cottage, *ma foi*. There must be something, and it is not always, monsieur"—he draws himself up, and his keen little eyes brighten—"that a *concierge* has a house with five windows and three doors to it. Has monsieur, then, seen the cottage of the *concierge* at St.-Antoine? Ah, bah! it is a rat-hole beside our cottage; fitter for a mouse than a man."

Captain Brand smiles.

"Yes, yes, your windows have an imposing appearance, but I should think they let in draughts, and I fancy one door would do."

Matthieu clears his throat and waves both hands. I see that another long speech is coming, and that Captain Brand must stop and listen to it; so I move softly on to the grass just behind me, and walk swiftly away under the larches.

Not so swiftly as to be unnoticed, for Captain Brand turns round and looks after me. I go on faster, and, as soon as the trees screen me, I set off running as fast as I can. When I reached the grassed slope, I found the frozen grass very slippery, and I fell twice before I reached the top; but I only hurt my hands a little, and I got safely to my room without meeting the captain.

It was rather rude to run away; but then, if I had stood much longer in that wind, I should certainly have taken cold; and, besides, we shall not breakfast for some time yet, and I am not fond of talking before breakfast.

I soon satisfied myself with these excuses, and I was glad to find my coffee waiting in my room; for my rapid scramble up-hill had tired me. Captain Brand's manner to Matthieu set me thinking about Eugène. I wonder why he is so haughty to inferiors; he used to speak to Matthieu the younger as if he were a dog; but then this may be customary in France with young men. If it is thus, I like English ways best. We are not so familiar with our servants, but I do not think we could ever speak to them so insolently. Perhaps I may be able to influence Eugène about this—I break off here in confusion—no, I must be much older and wiser than I am now before my advice can be of use to any creature.

At breakfast-time Captain Brand is unusually lively, and he talks enough for me and himself, too.

"Ah, Miss Runaway"—he smiles at me while I am saying "Good-morning" to Madame La Peyre—"you missed a great deal of sage advice this morning; the *concierge* grew quite eloquent after you left; and then came the postman, and told us all the news of Caudebec. He said a carriage from Lillebonne, last evening, had driven down-hill too fast; it upset, and the pole was broken. No one could be found to mend it but Monsieur Matthieu the blacksmith, who it appears is in no way related to Matthieu the *concierge*."

"Ah! no, indeed," says Madame La Peyre; "he is a very fine, big man, Monsieur Matthieu, of Caudebec."

"And Monsieur Ferbonblanc the tinman has again beaten his wife," Captain Brand goes on.

"*Ah, mon Dieu!* it is sad," cries Madame La Peyre, lifting up her pretty hands; "that little man has always been a *mauvais sujet*."

A little while after Rosalie came in with the letters. I was wondering why she brought them—this seemed to be one of the few duties which Matthieu roused himself to perform—and I looked up at her; her light, yellow-fringed eyes were fixed on me with an expression that made me turn away at once. She looked perfectly spiteful as she put the letters down before Madame La Peyre.

"Ah, pardon, madame," she said, when

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she had waited for Madame La Peyre to look at them, "but there is one for mademoiselle, and I think I must give it to mademoiselle herself, for she has been so anxious to get it from the *facteur*."

She walks slowly round the table, stops behind my chair, and drops the letter in my plate.

When my hair is quite white, and my face quite wrinkled, and I am an old, infirm woman, forgetting alike the joys and sorrows of my life, I am sure I can never forget those awful minutes; the stump, stump, stump of Rosalie's heavy shoes seemed to be stamping on my heart, as they echoed on the bare, wooden floor. All the blood in my body flew up into my face; the room itself was going round, and I had a choked feeling in my ears and throat. I did not hear or see any thing; even the letter on my plate was a mere white patch in a sort of blurred indistinctness around me.

No one spoke. Then I saw, as if I were in a dream, madame and Captain Brand gazing at me with shocked, startled faces; and then Captain Brand was bending forward and speaking to Madame La Peyre.

I hardly know how I got courage to move; but I rose up, took my letter, and walked out of the room without saying a word.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

SENTENCE.

It always seems to me that those unhappy criminals sentenced to be flogged once a week till all the lashes are given are much more to be pitied than the man who gets all his punishment at once — the anticipation must be so much harder to bear than the lashes themselves. I had often looked forward to this moment, and told myself I should really be glad to have a clear explanation with Captain Brand, and to be freed from all this miserable restraint and secrecy; and yet, now that I was actually found out, I felt that it would be much easier to jump down from the top of the steep cliff into the little river below than to face Captain Brand.

I was standing at the top of the cliff as I thought this. I had fled at once to my room, and, seeing no hope of privacy there, for there are no bolts to the bedroom-doors at Château-Fontaine, I snatched my hat and a shawl, and ran down the spiral staircase leading from my old bedroom. I knew this would only lead me to the place where I had said "Good-by" to Eugène; but still, that was at the back of the house, and I felt quite sure I could find my way down the wooded height to the little bridge over the river, now that the trees were leafless.

Almost without knowing how I got there, I found myself on the heights just below the little formal garden. The trees were planted very thickly, but still I could trace out the path leading to the bridge; there were many paths winding in and out, up and down, among the slender, close-set tree-stems; but most of these misled purposely, so as to give the idea of a much larger space than the wood really covered; only one led down, with many turns and twists, to the bridge.

I could not take away the bridge or close it behind me, and yet I had a vague feeling of safety, at least temporary, when I reached the other bank of the river.

The trees were so much larger here that their trunks gave some shelter, and I had an unspeakable longing to hide myself from every one. There was one old oak-trunk so overgrown with ivy that the branches atop were shaded and stunted in growth; but the ivy was so luxuriant that it made up for want of height by the breadth which its shining green foliage spread round the trunk. I crouched down at the foot of this trunk, and then I cried heartily—not from fear of Captain Brand, but because I knew that the shame of my present trouble was caused by myself. Certainly Eugène had asked me to keep his letters a secret from every one. But what then? Eugène was not my husband, and I was not bound to him. Try as I would to seem less black in my own eyes, I saw too plainly that I had done that which I knew to be wrong and base. Ah! that was what wrung my heart with such keenness of anguish. I had given Captain Brand a right to despise me. You are, perhaps, thinking it strange I did not read my letter. Ah, no! I shrank from it as the cause of my present misery. I did not even take it out of the pocket where I had thrust it away as I fled up-stairs. And yet, it was not the letter that had betrayed me. Captain Brand had not seen it close; and, although madame must have seen it was a French letter, still, it is

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possible she did not recognize the handwriting. It is I who have betrayed myself by my shame and strange behavior. I remember now I had scarcely begun breakfast when I walked off in that determined way out of the room. Well, am I really sorry? The end must have come some day. Certainly I would not have gone through any more deceit to keep it off. Captain Brand will ask what was the matter, and I must tell him.

My head aches terribly, and my heart beats till it seems as if it would burst its way out of my body. In a far-off, feeble way—like a dream in which one tries to grasp something which always falls from one's fingers—I know that I ought to set my thoughts in order, that I ought to be prepared with an answer when I see Captain Brand, for I shall have to see him. There is no use in crying, and trembling, and shivering, as I have been shivering for full five minutes. If I have been wrong I must take the consequences bravely, and own frankly that I have been wrong, without any excuses.

It was a great pity that Captain Brand did not find me while this penitent fit lasted. I should, perhaps, for once in my life, have behaved well, and the end might have been different; certainly the old line, "*Souvent femme varie*," was verified in my case.

I left off crying, and leaned back among the glossy ivy-leaves. I covered my face with my hands, utterly exhausted, and weary of all this strain. I do not remember any thing after this, till I heard the dried twigs snapping and crackling under a rapid tread, and then I gave myself up to my fate; the sound did not come from the side of the bridge; it was still so distant that I could have escaped through the trees and across the stream to the château; but for what? only to delay this meeting which must happen sooner or later? So I sit still, listening to the sharp cry each twig gives as it snaps into fragments under the firm, fast-approaching footsteps.

I give a sigh of relief, when at last they pause silently before me. I cannot look up.

There is just a little waiting, but only very brief, and then he says, in a sort of forced voice:

"I must speak to you, but it shall be where you please; shall it be here, or indoors?"

I try to look up and reply fearlessly, but I cannot. I answer, in a sullen, hushed way:

"Why not here? it does not signify where," and then I rise up, for I feel choked sitting there at his feet.

He moves about restlessly and snaps more twigs, but then, seemingly, he makes up his mind:

"I wish you to tell me whom that letter is from, and why you showed so much agitation in receiving it."

Can I get the words out? I try twice, and my tongue moves dryly without sound; then I strain every nerve and say, quietly:

"The letter is from Monsieur le Comte de Vaucresson; it agitated me because I—"

I cannot do it; I cannot say out in words —"I love him." I look at Captain Brand with an effort; I must know what his face is like.

He is so pale that he is quite ugly. I did not think a sunburnt man could turn to such a ghastly hue.

"I see you have some grace left," he says at last, sternly; "how many of these letters have you received?"

"I do not acknowledge your right to ask, but I will tell you: this is the third letter I have received."

"And you have answered them?" He shouts this out in such a loud, terrible voice, that I am angry and frightened all at once.

"Of course I have, but you have no right to question me." I move forward toward the path that leads to the bridge.

"Stay here—you must!" he says, not quite so loud, but very sternly, and, as I still move on, he grasps my wrist so tightly in one of his hands that I could not wrench it away if I tried my utmost. "Listen to me, Gertrude: setting aside all lawful right of my own, I pledged myself to your mother, to watch over you, and guide you; even as an unmarried woman, you have acted wrongly in carrying on a clandestine correspondence, but—"

"Stop," I say, breathless, and panting with eagerness; "that is just what I am—I am unmarried; do not dare to say I am your wife."

He drops my arm instantly, and falls back a step or two, as if I had struck him.

"What do you mean?" he says, in a puzzled voice; "how can I help being your husband?"

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Some power suddenly brings back my courage; I turn round so that I face him, my hands clasped tightly on my bosom.

"I mean, what you must know I have always meant, that you had no right to marry me against my will; that I will never consider myself your wife, or acknowledge your authority; till now I have concealed my correspondence with Monsieur de Vaucresson; for the future I shall write to him, and receive his letters, as often as I please. But for him, my life would be hateful."

Till I came to Eugène's name, I had looked straight at Captain Brand, and I had felt my eyes flash while I spoke; till then he had seemed cowed by my excitement; but when I came to this, I flushed deeply, and my eyes drooped, for, was I not confessing my love? I suppose this broke the spell that had controlled Captain Brand.

I did not look up, but his voice told me how angry he was.

"I see I have quite mistaken your whole character"—he spoke coldly, almost contemptuously—"you seemed to me so frank, so innocent, that I thought indulgence and patience were all you needed from me. I am very sorry I so mistook you, for this mistaken indulgence has only given reins to your misconduct."

He paused for some minutes, and drew a deep breath. When he went on, his voice sounded less angry, but even colder:

"You do not care, of course, for my opinion; but I tell you that no sorrow I have ever known gave me half the pain I felt this morning, when I saw you suddenly convicted of deceit. At Merdon, I doubted you for an instant, and then reproached myself severely for my suspicion. Now, listen. I have had time to think while I have been seeking for you this morning. If I can set you free, I will do so. It is no light sacrifice to give up the hope I had of winning in time your love. But do not mistake me"—he said this so sternly that I looked up with a half cry of terror; he met my eyes for just an instant, and then turned away, as if he hated the sight of me—"the girl whose love I wished to win was, as I thought, artless, frank, innocent of all evil; not a girl who would listen to the folly of the first stranger who flattered her vanity, and then carry on a secret correspondence with him. God knows how many falsehoods you have told, you poor, unhappy child! but, if I can help it, you shall tell no more—you shall not sink lower yet."

I had covered up my face long ago, and by this time I was sobbing heartily. Oh, the agony his words gave me! for though, as I thought then, he made me out worse than I was, yet I knew some of them were true, and I felt how a high-minded, honorable man must despise this wretched meanness and cowardice—for it had come to me all at once that I had been a wretched coward with regard to Captain Brand. It may be that the prospect of release helped my penitence. I only know that I could have gone down on my knees and asked him to forgive me.

He left off speaking, and I sank down at the foot of the ivied tree; but I could not check my sobs all at once—they sounded very loud in the stillness round us, for I heard nothing else, except the falling of a twig now and then from the larch-branches, or the scramble of a squirrel in search of beech-nuts.

"Have you any thing to say to me?" he said, more gently. "I shall leave Château-Fontaine at once."

I forget Eugène, myself, every thing, but the intense longing for Captain Brand's forgiveness; ah! for more than forgiveness, for what I could not get, for what it was agony to feel never could be again—to be in his thoughts as I had once been. And the knowledge of the hopelessness of this, with the consciousness that, like wretched Humpty Dumpty, I had flung myself down and shattered all that I once seemed to him, kept me dumb with shame and sorrow. I do not know what prompted my words, but I said, in a weary, wretched voice:

"Shall I never see you again?"

"Never—unless you specially wish it; I cannot—" he stopped, fidgeted, and then stamped his foot on the ground, and went on in a steady, hard voice—ah, a voice that told me how utterly I had fallen in his opinion—"I would not if I could—forget the promise I made to your mother. Whatever you may be to me in the future cannot release me from this sacred promise; if you ever want help or advice from me, Gertrude, ask it freely, but," he went on, bitterly, "there is small chance of your wanting this, feeling as you feel toward me; I think we need never meet again."

And what did I say in answer to these words, which even now, as I read them, stir

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my heart so painfully? Nothing, not a word.

. . . . . .

"Good-by—God bless you!" said Captain Brand, at last. He made no attempt to take my hand in his. I suppose he waited for me to offer it, but I was powerless, so heart-stricken that I just bent my head in reply to his words, that was all.

I did not dare to look up till the sound of his footsteps told me he was already some distance from the spot where I stood.

As I write this down with the knowledge that it will be read in quiet leisure by those who were perhaps never deeply moved in their lives, I feel that I shall be called cold-hearted, unnatural, every thing that is most unwomanly, because I did not speak; and yet, though I blame myself deeply because I did not own my fault, and strongly for much of this part of my conduct, I know that I am blameless here. Captain Brand's words had so stirred my heart that I was at that moment in earnest to do right; it was no self-will, no power of my own at all, which kept me silent. I was simply stricken dumb by shame and by contrition.

I had never before been accused or convicted of any serious fault. At home, if I had not been taken much notice of, still any irrepressibleness or impulsiveness—and this, I think, had been the worst of my misdemeanors—had been smiled at as ignorance and rawness, and only seriously regarded by my sister Jane; but to be openly accused of falsehood, and to know that I deserved the accusation, made me dumb and weak. "Is it I myself?" I said, in stupefied wonder, and then I felt powerless to move. I must stand there where he had branded me with cowardice and deceit. Fall yet lower, did he say? How could I? Can there be any fault so black as falsehood?

The wind came rustling round the ivied trunk—it was pitilessly cold; I shrank back among the ivy for shelter, but it did not yield much. I think the cold must have been at my heart, for it felt like ice. Once I made a sudden movement forward to the bridge, and then I drew back with a shiver of fear at my own daring. Had not Captain Brand said he no longer cared for me? that I was nothing to him? He had cast me off forever, unless I should sink so low as to have no friend left but himself! This was how I read his farewell words. I could not force myself on his notice. I strained my ears for the sound of departing wheels, but none came. How long should I have to stay in that death-like stillness, with only my own thoughts?—and I seemed to turn away from them, and dread the stings they would give to my already-burdened conscience.

A mocking voice whispered: "You have longed for this—longed to be told by Captain Brand that he sets you free. You have felt as if the very thought would make you dance and sing, and set your pulses in a glow!"

Is it true, then, as Mrs. Dayrell said, that happiness is only in expectation? Can nothing one has wished for make one glad when it really comes? It is some relief to feel that I can look Eugène in the face honestly, and that I can tell him I am almost free, and no one can prevent me from writing to him.

But, strangely enough, I feel more guilty now that I am free than I did when I was deceitful—there is a big stone in my heart, which will choke me if it does not go away.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

LIGHT IN DARKNESS.

I do not know how long I sat there crouched against the ivy-covered tree-stump; but I can never forget the anguish. How I had longed for freedom, and to be rid of all need for concealment and contrivance! and now it was all over. Captain Brand had said I was free; he had said he never wished to see me again. There was no obstacle between me and Eugène; and, instead of joy at my deliverance, I was crushed with shame and sorrow. I would have given up every other thing to hear Captain Brand speak to me once more as he used to speak at Merdon, to feel that I had never *merited* his contempt. Ah! that was the sting—merited his contempt. It was not his contempt that stung me, it was the heavy ache at my heart, which said, "I deserve every word he has spoken."

Ache—ache—ache! A dull, aching stupor. It seems to make me too heavy to move. I cannot bear it—I must struggle to be free from it. I must run after Captain Brand, and implore him to unsay his words, and tell him I cannot live without his good opinion.

I start up again, and look round me. I

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see by the changed light that it must be a long time since he went away; he has left Château-Fontaine by this time.

Now that I am fully roused, I know that this idea was foolish and unreal. How could I ever have got courage to follow him and make such an appeal? and then, while I stand stupefied with this miserable heartache, something bids me try and bear it; says that this very pain is good for me, if I own that I have deserved it, and do not rebel. This is such a new light to me, that there is a startling, almost an awful, solemnity in it. I stand thinking, and there comes a crunching of the brittle twigs near the bridge. It may be he is coming back, after all, and I shake with terror; but, as I listen, I hear the rustling of a skirt over the fallen leaves, and I know it is Angélique, even before her tall, straight figure appears between the leafless trees.

"Ah!" She gives me a little look, and then her eyes go beyond me. "I have been looking for mademoiselle everywhere. I came to find her to see Monsieur l'Abbé."

Although I know how much depends on the abbé's arrival, I say, calmly, "He is come at last, is he?" and then I add, with an effort, "Did he come before Captain Brand went away?"

Angélique's eyes move swiftly back to my face, and the simple question in them makes me shy and confused.

"Yes, mademoiselle."

It is too cruel of Angélique. She knows all I want to ask, and she will not spare me.

"Well," I say, crossly, "and did they see one another?"

"But yes, mademoiselle. The abbé has met Monsieur le Capitaine as he came in from the park, and has shut himself up with him for a long time; and then Monsieur le Capitaine has sent for me, and asked me to seek for mademoiselle; and then he has gone away in the *voiture* which brought Monsieur l'Abbé."

"And Mr. Dayrell, is he come, too?"

"No, mademoiselle; the abbé is alone."

My heart felt easier at this news. In these first moments of penitence it was a relief to hear that Eugène had not come to Château-Fontaine. I could not explain it to myself, but my mind was so full of Captain Brand, that it would have seemed like sacrilege to admit any pleasant thoughts into my sorrow.

I went across the bridge, while Angélique followed me in silence.

The river looked mournful in the cold, gray light; it was in harmony with my feelings, and the cobweb-like tracery of branches in the wood below the château had a red tinge, that seemed to warm the cold, gray haze. I wished there were leaves on the trees; shade and gloom would have suited me better than this bare openness; for, I suppose, next to the blessing of some loving heart, into which one may pour every grief, and even every petty vexation, one seeks for shadow as a hiding-place for feelings which instinct says should be sheltered from the prying eyes of the outside world, till we have learned to hide them ourselves under a mask of smiles.

As I walk along, I go back to this outside world, and remember that I have to meet Madame La Peyre as well as the abbé.

"Angélique," I say, with a sort of groan, at which I observe she starts, "I dare say you will think me very wicked; but I believe if I could slip into the river by accident—you see it is wide enough and deep enough now to drown any one—I should be much happier than I can ever be, living on here, a trouble to every one."

"Mademoiselle!"

Angélique looks just as I knew she would look—startled and grieved, but not a bit angry. I should like to make her angry. I begin to think extra good people do as much harm as others, if they provoke one—try and irritate them.

"Well, why not? I should like to know what there is in my life that is so well worth living for, or what good or pleasure I am to any one?"

"Does mademoiselle wish me to tell her why she should wish to live?"

I never heard her speak so gravely. I look at her against my will, and I am hushed out of all petulance, there is such a sweet, serious earnestness in her face.

"Yes, if you please," I say, gently.

"Mademoiselle knows, as well as I can tell her, that we have to live our lives, not alone to find pleasure in them, or to do our own will in them, but because they are the gift of God."

This seems to me silly.

"But, according to that, every thing is God's gift—the sky, the trees, the flowers, the very air we breathe. I do not see that this makes my life happier."

"I told mademoiselle that she knew—and

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she is so clever that she will find out for herself—and yet" (she looks very sad) "I sometimes think that it is because Madame Dayrell and mademoiselle are heretics that they have not found out this—that *le bon Dieu* gives us all we have, and it is all his—not ours."

"Something mysterious in this," I thought rebelliously. "Is Angélique really going to preach her own doctrines at last?" I go on faster. I am half ashamed of the eagerness I have to make her explain herself, and she cannot see my face if she is left behind.

"You are too deep for me—I do not understand—unless you mean that we are mere puppets; and certainly I have not been taught that. I have been taught that my will is my own, to do right or wrong as I choose."

"Yes, but yes," she said, quickly, and she came up beside me, "that is what I mean that mademoiselle has said. Our will is our own, and we can give it, our will, to *le bon Dieu*—it, and our love also. Ah! mademoiselle, even the poor beggars have two offerings they can make to him."

I walked on in hushed silence. Something in the effect of her words upon me said that Angélique was speaking truth; and yet I rebelled against learning truth from Angélique. She was very good. I had not lived so many months a witness to her gentle, loving, truthful ways, without becoming sure that she was a really religious woman; but then she was an inferior and a Roman Catholic, and all my prejudices of nature and education rose against such teaching.

"Still," I said, half aloud, "one must get good from goodness, and not one of the Apostles was a gentleman except St. Paul."

"Angélique"—I could not look at her: I felt my own ignorance, and I was ashamed of it—"I used to learn about an old woman who always denied herself what she most wished for; do you mean to say that that foolish old creature was right?"

But, as I asked the question, I seemed to see a new meaning in a text I had often read, and had even learned by heart, "If ye love me, keep my commandments." I had read it like this: we were to keep the commandments because it was our duty to keep them; from a certain cold, conventional love of God which I had grown up to suppose every one had, but which I believe in my own case was far more truly a cold, shrinking fear of punishment if I broke any of the commandments. Now, in the new and glowing light which Angélique's words had shed into my heart, and which seemed to be warming it from its cold, aching weight, I read the words differently. If I really loved our Lord with all my heart, and soul, and strength, I should try to do his will, and keep his law, simply to please him, and as the only real way in which I could show my love to him; and, instead of shrinking from sin only because the committing it entailed punishment, I should shrink from it because He hated it, and because He had suffered to destroy its power.

Angélique must surely have prayed earnestly for me as she walked beside me. The thought grew till I felt helpless to struggle against it. At last it seemed to me I had found the help I had so long wanted. I must give up my will and my love, and all would be well. Certainly, in that moment of intense conviction, I looked on my will as if it were indeed a puppet, and took it for granted that in one moment I could transfer to our Lord all the love I had hitherto spent on self. This thought must have been very rapid, for Angélique answered as if I had just spoken.

"I do not quite understand mademoiselle. *Le bon Dieu* is so merciful that, if we love him, He puts good desires into our hearts; we have only to be sure our will is the same as his, and then it is quite easy. I do not think, mademoiselle, that the old woman you speak of was a Catholic."

I laughed, and Angélique kept silence. I suppose she was shocked at my levity. I said, suddenly:

"Then I suppose you think that it was God's will that I was married to Captain Brand, and that my duty is to submit?"

"But there can be no doubt," she said, simply.

I faced round upon her and caught both her stiff elbows tightly.

"Angélique, you are a dear old thing, but were you ever in love in your life?"

A faint blush rose in her old face, and I kissed her.

"Come," I said, "I will listen to you now. I begin to think you will have some sympathy for me."

"I loved my husband, mademoiselle; it is the duty of a wife to love her husband."

"Ah, hush, Angélique! Now I see you

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know nothing of love—duty and love are distinct. If I only loved a husband by duty, I should soon grow wicked and hate him. Ah, don't look shocked;" and then my sadness comes back like a sudden wave, crushing all the bright peace which had stolen into my struggling soul. "Suppose I love some one else who is not my husband—what am I to do then?"

I said this partly from contradiction, and also because I thought that Angélique would show her Roman Catholic bigotry by telling me at once that I was sinful, and that such a love was not to be allowed. Some reticence had come to me, but still I was ready to rebel.

She looked very sad, and she gazed earnestly at me before she answered.

"Mademoiselle must pray—she must pray day and night to be delivered from this danger. Ah, if mademoiselle would pray to blessed Mary and our holy saints, she would be safe."

"No, Angélique, that is wrong; I could never do that."

I turned away; it seemed to me that, by this flagrant effort at conversion, Angélique had weakened all her former words.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

RECONCILED.

The abbé seemed to be on the lookout for me; he was standing at the top of the steps. He waved his hand and came forward to meet me.

He was as charmingly courteous as ever. What a rare gift manner is! But after the first greeting he turned from me to Angélique.

"I think you are wanted, *ma mère*"—he spoke to the old servant with such a pleasant smile. "Monsieur Henri came just now, and he is with his wife, and no doubt the interview will agitate her."

"*Ah, mon Dieu*, he has come, then!" Angélique looked pale an instant, and then her eyes shone with joy. "*Bien, bien, Monsieur l'Abbé!*" and she hurried off to her charge.

The abbé gave a little sigh, but I exclaimed: "Is Mr. Dayrell really come? Oh, I am so very glad; now poor Mrs. Dayrell will be quite happy again."

He looked at me with such an inquisitive, searching glance, that I felt puzzled and abashed. It seemed to me, too, that his manner was changed. He was as courteous; but I missed the fatherly playfulness which had made me so fond of him. He led the way to the *salon* instead of stopping at his study-door, and gave me a chair as if I had been a princess.

"Madame—mademoiselle will excuse my absence," he said, bowing; "but I have still to arrange some matters with my sister."

He went away, and left me chilled and disappointed. I could only imagine that Madame La Peyre had told him about this morning's work. He certainly seemed displeased with me. And yet, no; why do I always think about self first? I suppose because I love nothing else so well. It is far more likely that the dear, good man was thinking so much of Mr. and Mrs. Dayrell that he forgot all about my affairs. How happy they must be, and yet how they must wish they had never vexed one another, and had not wasted all these months in making one another's heart ache! I remember thinking, a long time ago, that it must be charming for a husband and wife not to love one another just at first, and then to quarrel and to part, and then to fall desperately in love with one another, and meet again to be happy ever after. I read a story like this once. What silly, unreal thoughts girls have! Oh, dear, I am not eighteen yet, but I know I shall never be a girl again. I have grown to feel so old, oh, so very old, to-day!

The door opens very gently, and a gentleman comes in. It is, of course, Mr. Dayrell, and he comes up to me, as if he expected to find me there.

He shakes hands with me.

"You must let me thank you for the affection you have shown my wife." He smiles; but I see his lip quivering under his mustache. "She talks constantly of Gertrude."

"How is she?" I speak hastily, for I do not quite know what to say to Mr. Dayrell.

He is very interesting-looking, very tall, and rather slender; his brown hair is full of gray locks, and it waves over his broad, thoughtful forehead. He has a long, irregular-shaped nose, and such large, bright, sweet, melancholy, brown eyes. I think he has a

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good mouth, but it is hidden by his beard and mustache. He is something like the pictures I have seen of Charles I., only Mr. Dayrell's is a grander, nobler face than King Charles's. I do not think Mr. Dayrell could be weak or deceitful either.

"She is better, they say" (his bright, happy look passed into deep sadness); "but she is fearfully weak and changed. She did not look much older than you do when I last saw her."

At this he turns to the window. My heart goes out to him at once. I like men to be brave and self-contained; they are more difficult to understand; but then how much more interesting than men are who talk easily about themselves and their feelings!

"She will soon get well *now*," I say, cheerfully; "I suppose I must not see her today."

"Why not?" he says; "it must do her good to see any one she loves."

Even I know better than this; but I believe I like Mr. Dayrell all the more for being such a thorough man, without any small feminine wisdom in his brain.

It is not easy to talk to Mr. Dayrell; he goes off into reveries, and rouses with a start to answer my questions; and, besides, I can only talk to him about Sydney and places he has visited, for it is awkward to speak much of Mrs. Dayrell.

It is a great relief when Madame La Peyre joins us. She goes straight up to Mr. Dayrell, and takes no notice of me; but still she and I have seen one another again, and it takes off some of the restraint.

I sit silent while they talk in the window-recess; suddenly I remember that that unhappy letter still lies unread in my pocket. I am not wanted; I am nothing to anybody here; there can be no selfishness in going to my own room.

When I get there I feel so tired, so utterly exhausted, that I lie down on my bed and I begin to cry. But this is very foolish. I have been longing and waiting all these months for Mr. Dayrell's return, and I ought to be singing a hymn of praise, instead of crying like a baby. All the morning misery tries to come back, but I take out Eugène's letter, and open it at last.

Well, I have read it twice; it is so short that I almost know it by heart; and yet I am quite calm, and not a bit in the excited state I was in when I first heard from him. Perhaps this is natural; perhaps it was only the novelty that so disturbed me; and it is possible that that delightful thrill, which seemed to me something quite unearthly, cannot be felt twice.

I am sure this is a charming letter. It tells me all Eugène feels, and the joy with which he looks forward to seeing me. And he is coming—yes, he is really coming—his mother is not well, or he would have come with the abbé—as soon as he can possibly leave Paris—he is coming to Château-Fontaine, and then, as he says, we shall be perfectly happy.

Perfectly happy! Shall I be perfectly happy? I say the words over to myself, and I come to the conclusion that they are only words. No one is perfectly happy. Even Angélique's talk proves that we are only likely ever to be happy when we do not follow our own inclinations. I should have thought, a week ago, that to be with Eugène at Château-Fontaine must be perfect happiness; and now a thorn seems to have come into my feelings. Whenever I think of his visit, I feel a sharp sting.

It is, perhaps, petty of me, but I feel a kind of anger with Eugène for having taught me to conceal our letters. Certainly, now that I feel so much older, and, somehow, so very much calmer, I see that I might and ought to have refused to do this; and I feel keenly that it would have been much better to do without those letters, for the misery I have suffered far outweighs any pleasure they gave; and those two answers that I wrote gave me a great deal of trouble. But then, when I see Eugène again, I suppose his influence will be as great as it was then, and I shall yield to it in the same way, although nothing shall ever make me consent to the slightest act of deceit.

It seems to me that I must have been infatuated; falsehood, or even the slightest concealment, has always been so very abhorrent to me. If my dear mother had lived, this could not have happened, for I could not have deceived her. Well, of course, I could not; for no girl worth the name of a woman can attempt to deceive a mother, even in the smallest matter, unless she is absolutely a wicked girl, whether her mother is kind or unkind. But, as I sit thinking, trying to keep my thoughts from Captain Brand, and to

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fix them on my meeting with Eugène, the prick grows sharper—a feeling much deeper than any I have yet known, except that on board the Eclair, when it seemed to me that my grief for my mother had been forgotten. I cannot understand this feeling. I struggle resolutely against it, and yet, at each struggle, it takes a stronger hold. It is a feeling of wrong-doing. Ever since I parted from Captain Brand this morning, our marriage has taken a real shape, and I grow more and more powerless when I try to deny its existence. I do not mean its present existence, for even Captain Brand says it shall, if possible, be set aside, and he has willingly set me free. But this feeling of remorse is for the past. If I really was his wife, then, indeed, I have been very, very wrong; so wrong that—

But I cannot sit here brooding. I start up, and shake the hair out of my eyes.

After all, I did not know I was doing wrong then, and I am punished by this shame and misery. All I can do now is to try not to be self-willed any more. If I have not my mother to help me, Angélique has made me see where I can get help and guidance, and surely this help ought to keep me true as much as any mother.

CHAPTER XL.

A VISIT TO MRS. DAYRELL.

Some few days passed by after this before I saw Mrs. Dayrell. Her husband sometimes said she was better; but he grew more and more silent and preoccupied, except just at times when he had the bright, sweet smile that I had seen at first.

I spent my time chiefly with the abbé, who gave me readings in French history, and took walks with me in the park, and talked with me on every subject but the one I dreaded. I longed to go into the village; but the abbé says that in France young ladies must not go out alone, and I try to submit patiently. Angélique has promised to take me over to Caudebec some market-day when she is less occupied with Mrs. Dayrell. She offered Rosalie as an escort, but I refused. Rosalie has kept out of my way since that morning, and I do not wish to have any talk with her, though I believe I am more reconciled to her ugliness since she has wreaked her spite. I dreaded something more tragic, for I feel sure she is half an idiot.

The buds on the trees get larger every day—little rosy cones, exquisite in tint, swell out of the larch-branches; and snow-drops and violets are frequent in the neglected shrubberies.

I am busy getting a bunch of these to give to Mr. Dayrell for his wife, when I see Angélique coming to find me.

She wants to take me to Mrs. Dayrell.

"She is stronger—much stronger, mademoiselle; but it will be better if mademoiselle does not contradict my poor madame."

"You spoil her," I say, teasingly; "she must be so happy, now she has her husband again, that she ought to be in good temper with all the world."

Angélique stands looking at me with that puzzling expression which I never saw in any one's eyes but hers: it is not a glance of reproof, it is as if she tried to look into me thoughts that she will not speak. All she says, as she follows me to the house, is:

"How many weeks our poor madame has been in bed!—she must be very weary."

I smile at the covert rebuke.

"You are a clever woman—" I begin, but Rosalie is on the steps, screaming in her shrillest notes for la mère Angélique. So I have to find my way alone to the sick-room.

I meet Mr. Dayrell on the stairs, but he takes no notice of me. He looks pale and tired.

I knock twice at the door before the faint voice says—

"Come in."

Mrs. Dayrell's face is flushed, and her eyes look as if she had been crying. I fancy I see a tear still on her cheek. She looked eager as I came in, but this faded, and she sighed.

"Well, Gertrude"—her tone was not hearty—"you see I am still a prisoner." Then she paused, pinching the fingers of my hand as it lay in hers. "Did you meet any one, child?" she said, timidly.

I could only think that she wanted me to say something about Mr. Dayrell. So I launched into admiration. "He quite fulfills the word charming," I added. "Don't you long to make haste and get well, so that you may be with him always?"

She looked so strange that I felt frightened.

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"You are like all the rest, Gertrude. I wonder if I shall ever find any one able to understand me or my feelings?"

She spoke bitterly. But I was still too much subdued in spirit to be vexed by her tone. I stood silent, for I did not understand her.

"You are a good child," she said, presently; "you have learned patience—you were not so patient when first you came to Merdon. Perhaps, like the rest of the world, you have more respect for me now that I have an actual husband than when I was in the position of a deserted wife?"

I felt shocked that she should speak so openly, and I felt wounded, too, and I suppose she saw this, for she said, gently:

"Kiss me, child. I know I am unbearable. Look at me, Gertrude, and then wonder at human perverseness. You saw me at Merdon pining to death for the sight of my husband, and cheered into life even by the hope of his return. Well, he is restored to me even before I expected, and he is—" her lips trembled, and tears sprang into her eyes—"ah, child, words cannot tell what he is! Ought I not to be happy and contented?"

I thought she was asking the question sincerely.

"Yes, of course; and you are happy. You look ever so much better and brighter."

"Do I?" Her eyes glowed with sudden light. "Give me a looking-glass, Gertrude. Henri says I look so weak and ill—so much older."

She sighed heavily.

I looked round. All the mirrors were fastened to the wall.

Mrs. Dayrell laughed, in her old, bitter way.

"You are as slow-witted as—" She checked herself. "Your wits are no nimbler than a man's, Gertrude, after all. If there had been a hand-glass on my dressing-table I should not have needed to ask you for it."

Her contempt so goaded me that, without stopping to reflect, I hurried off to my room, and fetched the tiny little mirror which had been put in my traveling-bag at Havre.

But when Mrs. Dayrell looked into it she turned white, and fell back on her pillow.

I was frightened, and I got the smelling-bottle I had seen her use, and held it for her to smell at.

She soon opened her eyes.

"Thank you," she said, faintly. "Some day I will tell you what you have done for me. Sit down now and wait. I shall be better presently. I have something still to say to you."

I sat waiting, stealing compunctious glances at the pale face on the pillow. How that one gaze at herself had quieted Mrs. Dayrell! It had acted like an opiate. I grew uneasy. Had Angélique purposely kept the invalid from the sight of her own worn face? I thought I would steal quietly from the room, and summon help. But Mrs. Dayrell seemed to guess my thoughts.

"Stay." She did not look round. "One can easily deceive you. You are sympathetic, but you are not observant. I asked you a question just now, and you thought you gave the right answer."

I saw her meaning now.

"I think I did answer rightly," I said, bluntly. "You said, '*Ought* I not to be happy and contented?'"

A smile flitted across her face, but it was sad again in a moment.

"I am too weak to tease, or I should say Gertrude has turned preacher. No—I am neither happy nor contented; and I make my husband miserable by my perverse folly. He wishes me dead, Gertrude; I know he does; and he will not have long to wait."

"Oh, hush!" I cried out, in distress. "You must not say it. It is not true. Why, he only thinks of you. He hardly ever speaks to any one."

She smiled.

"You simple child! If his mind were at ease, he would scarcely brood over his happiness in silence. No. It has always been so. I always try to make those I love miserable." A sob came in her voice, but she went on: "I wonder why I can speak to you so freely, Gertrude; more freely than I have ever been able to speak to any human creature. It is, perhaps, because you are like me in some ways. But I believe it is, most of all, because of your isolation; and because I know by instinct that as yet you have not found any one in whom you could confide, even if you ever commit such a folly. I believe," she turned round, and looked at me fully, "you are more likely to confide in me than in Madame La Peyre or in Angélique."

She looks so searchingly that I am obliged to answer before I have quite decided.

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"Perhaps"—and then I feel guilty, for I know I could not speak quite freely to Mrs. Dayrell. It seems ungenerous to feel it after the way in which she has spoken to me; but I shrink from her confidence. I suppose I am reserved, and ignorant; but it seems almost coarse that any one can speak so freely of her husband. "But, then, I have nothing to tell now. You all know all about me."

As I say this, I suddenly remember that probably Mrs. Dayrell has not heard of Captain Brand's last visit. But she is too full of thought to notice my confusion.

"Take me as a warning," she says. "Never wish for happiness. At Merdon, after I saw that good Mr. Howard, I used to lie picturing my meeting with Henri—he was so loving and tender—as he is; for it is not his fault if I am vexatious. And I was so good, so sweet, so every thing that a wife should be! So I was just for the first day. And now—now, Gertrude" (she clasped her long, thin fingers over her eyes), "I am more like a wasp than a woman."

I saw tears shining through her fingers, and I rose up gently.

"I believe I must go to the abbé," I said. "But I will come again to-morrow."

"Good-by," she said, but without looking up.

I moved gently across the room; and I fancy she thought I was gone. Just as I opened the door, I heard a moan, and I stopped.

"O Henri, my darling—my darling, how much better not to have seen you again than to grieve you by my temper and self-will!"

I closed the door noiselessly. In the wrung agony of her voice I had learned the strength of her feelings, and also the strength of an indulged sin.

I crept along the gallery, shuddering and trembling. The *salon* door stood open. The abbé had a letter in his hand; he was talking to Madame La Peyre.

I went in, but they did not notice me.

"Poor woman!" the abbé said. "Yes, Madame la Comtesse is dead, and Eugène is no longer a minor, and, worse than all, he wants to come here."

"Yes, yes, the poor boy! and why should he not come?"

I moved quickly up to the fireplace, beside which they stood, and the abbé saw me.

"No, it is not desirable that he should come." And then he turned to me, with his sweet smile: "Mademoiselle is ready for our history-reading, is it not so?" and he led the way to the study.

CHAPTER XLI.

MARKET-DAY IN AN OLD NORMAN TOWN.

A WEEK has dragged on wearily. Mr. Dayrell looks yet more melancholy, and he shakes his head sadly when I ask how his wife is. No one speaks in the gallery, and we move gently past the double doors which lead to her rooms; there seems to be a hushed mystery in the house, working on silently to some terrible ending. What will the ending be? Will she die, and never have the solace of atoning to her husband for all her wrong-doing? I seem to have learned lately that lip-repentance is not worth much; it may relieve for a moment, but I do not think it can cure that aching longing to wipe out faults by doing better deeds. If I believed in lip-repentance I would write to Captain Brand, and ask the abbé to send on my letter—the abbé is so clever that he would be able to do it—but this seems idle. Captain Brand is such a man of deeds himself that he would only smile and pity, and I want more than his pity—oh, I must have his esteem, or I can never be at peace again.

Ever since that terrible day—the day which first set me free from all that degradation of deceit, by degrading me forever with Captain Brand—I have been very sad and quiet. I think, after the first tempest had passed over, quite as great an upset, although a more peaceful one, happened in my thoughts about myself and my life. It was perhaps the shame, perhaps that talk with Angélique, perhaps something I feel too deeply to talk about; but the effect remains, and it is a very strange and startling one—*I have begun to hate myself*, and when I said just now, I long to gain Captain Brand's esteem, something seemed to whisper, "Don't waste time in wishing, but learn to become what he cannot help esteeming." I feel sure that this constantly-rising thought is not the selfish preoccupation which I so dislike to remember, but that, if I only could find it out, there is something yet left for me to do.

It seems natural to think of Eugène in the

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midst of this sadness about Mrs. Dayrell, because he must be in such grief. He never talked about his mother, but he must be so wretched at losing her. I asked Madame La Peyre about Madame de Vaucresson's death.

She shook her head.

"Ah, it is all very sad," she said. "It appears that this illness had been coming on a long time, and she knew it, but she would not send for the doctors till too late. She was too proud to submit to illness, and so at last she died quite suddenly, and though she wished to alter her will she had not the power, and my brother is very sorry—he says it is a great mistake."

"What is a great mistake?"

"The countess's will, my child; the young Count de Vaucresson is only one-and-twenty, and his mother, to whom all the property belonged, has kept every thing in her own hands, and he has no knowledge of affairs. If she had lived he was not to have come into his inheritance till he was twenty-five, but, by some oversight, her death was not provided against, and my brother does not consider Eugène fit to have the management of property."

"Then he is quite his own master?"

"Yes;" and then Madame La Peyre looked in my face, and I saw in hers that half-comic mixture of compunction and disquiet which I had seen there more than once at Merdon.

After this, Eugène's name was not mentioned between us—indeed, we all grew absorbed in anxiety for Mrs. Dayrell. Our thoughts seemed centred on those closed doors in the gallery, and they were closed now to all but the husband and Angélique, except when the little bustling doctor drove over from Caudebec.

I was walking up and down the terrace with Madame La Peyre when he arrived. He ran up the steps, bowing so rapidly as he passed that only a vision of his red nose with its wrinkled bridge, and his goggle-eyes behind blue glasses, could be seen.

"Ah, he is a wonderful man, our doctor," said madame; "he can tell us all about the ancient coins and vases that are dug up at Lillebonne, and he knows the whole history of our church: he can tell you the age of every bit of it. It is singular that he should not be able to cure our Barbara."

She was still speaking when the doctor came out of the house. His face was redder than before, and his bow was still more hurried as he passed us.

As he disappeared, Mr. Dayrell joined us. He looked excited and vexed, but he spoke gently.

"Eugénie," he said, "there is no use in Doctor Véron's visits: he does not do Barbara any good, and the sight of him irritates her. She craves for an English doctor, and I shall go to England to get one."

"Thou, Henri, to England? Is it not better to write, or even fetch one from Paris?"

"No, no!" he spoke much more rapidly—he seemed to think he was alone with Madame La Peyre—"I am so glad to go—glad to have a chance of proving to Barbara that I really wish her to live."

"Hush!" Madame La Peyre spoke quickly, but I slipped away and was soon hidden in the shrubbery. This was then the secret of his constant unhappiness—his wife would not believe in his forgiveness or his love.

When I see Mrs. Dayrell again, shall I tell her what he said just now? And yet, why should I tell her? Loving her as he does, he has long ago told her all that could convince her, if she could believe; and again I saw that despairing face and those woful, incredulous blue eyes, and heard the mournful wail of her last words. Surely she will believe he loves her when she hears of his journey; and perhaps the English doctor will free her of some of this pain, and when she suffers less she will be more reasonable.

The last few days have been so genial and spring-like that the buds have swelled rapidly, and some of the branches have put on a powdery hue of most tender green. The birds are holding quite a concert in the shrubbery this morning. As I listen to it, the sad atmosphere of these days lightens, and I feel my heart swelling with hope. It is impossible that, while all Nature is preparing itself for the bright joy of spring, this life, which has the power of making another life so happy, should be cut off.

I must ask Angélique to tell me her real opinion of Mrs. Dayrell's state.

Going back into the house I meet Angélique in the hall.

"Do you know Mr. Dayrell is going to England?" I ask.

"But yes, mademoiselle, and for that reason, if mademoiselle wills, I can go with

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her to market to-morrow. I shall not be able to leave madame while her husband is away, and he is to start to-morrow afternoon. Can mademoiselle be ready at five o'clock?" she said, doubtfully; "and will mademoiselle pardon if we travel in a cart?—for there is only one carriage fit for use now, and that will have to take Monsieur Dayrell and Monsieur l'Abbé to Yvetôt."

"O Angélique, how delightful! Be sure you call me in time."

I felt as excited as I suppose a girl feels at the prospect of her first ball.

So many months of seclusion made the journey of a few miles with Angélique an adventure to look forward to.

I woke several times in fear of having overslept myself, and at last, when Angélique came to rouse me, I was fast asleep.

Before I was dressed she brought me a cup of coffee; but madame said we were to breakfast at the inn at Caudebec, so we were soon on our way to the gate. How lovely the park looked in the early morning! a faint wreath of mist fading away between the boles of the larch-trees gave a velvet tint to every thing, and set me wondering why Nature is so much lovelier when there is a touch of indistinctness in it.

The village was astir, although the church-clock struck five as we passed it; Angélique nodded to several old women and children standing in the pretty little gardens behind the hedges that bordered each side of the road.

Old Matthieu drove our vehicle, which was only a cart, although it had a comfortable cushioned seat, and as easy springs as a carriage.

We soon turned into the road beside the river, and I was glad of old Matthieu's flow of gossip, for the remembrance of my first arrival jarred painfully; our last journey had been made under cover of darkness, and we had all been completely engrossed with anxiety for Mrs. Dayrell till we reached Château-Fontaine.

Now, as we jogged on between the lofty wooded *côte* on one side and the broad river shimmering through the gray silvery trees which bordered the sloping meadows forming its bank, my heart sank like lead as I remembered. What an innocent, harmless child I was then, and how fond Captain Brand was of me! and I thought of him then as of a kind of elder brother, spite of my loneliness, and spite of the unknown home before me. I certainly must have enjoyed that journey, or I could not recall it with such regret. And then—though I was not deceitful then—I was utterly selfish; I had no thought for Captain Brand; it seemed to me only right that he should minister to my needs.

"Voilà la Maison Blanche," says Matthieu, and we pass beneath a large white house high up above the road. "Tiens," he goes on in his toothless gossip, "v'là Madame Vagnon;" and from a gate in an orchard a little beyond drives out a sort of chaise-cart, with a stout little dapple-gray Norman horse. There are two women in the cart, with high-crowned muslin caps. One looks small, and pale, and withered; the other, who is driving, has a fine Norman face, with aquiline features, and clear, rather stern, blue eyes. She must have been very handsome once; now her fair skin has turned to a golden brown, and looks dry and baked by constant exposure.

"Bonjour, la Mère Angélique!" she calls out, in a high-pitched, cheerful voice, reining up her eager little horse to let us come alongside. "Bonjour, Monsieur Matthieu—bonjour, ma'm'selle"—she gives me a quick, scrutinizing glance—"and how goes it at Château-Fontaine with Monsieur l'Abbé and Madame La Peyre—it goes well, does it not?"

"Yes, yes, I thank you, madame, and how is it with Mademoiselle Henriette?" Angélique and the little withered woman smile at each other with, it seemed to me, a peculiar and significant sweetness, and then, after a few inquiries for Monsieur Matthieu's rheumatism, and a hope that mademoiselle will enjoy the market—this said with much smiling grace—Madame Vagnon shakes her reins, and off trots the gray Norman horse on the road to Caudebec.

"Who is that little old woman, Angélique? I can see she is a friend of yours."

Angélique smiles.

"Every one loves Ma'm'selle Henriette, mademoiselle," she says; "when she was little she had a fall, and ever since she has had one leg shorter than the other, but no one ever heard her murmur. She always thinks it is she who ought to comfort others; she never will be waited on."

I thought this was perhaps the cause of

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MARKET-DAY IN AN OLD NORMAN TOWN.

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her sympathy with Angélique. I asked if she lived at the White House.

"No, mademoiselle; Madame Vagnon would gladly give her a home there, but Henriette says she will work as long as she can, so she has a room in Caudebec, where she mends lace and irons collars and caps."

"Bah!" says old Matthieu, "that has not common-sense in it; she could be quite useful enough to her sister at the White House to make up for the trifle of expense she would be at in keeping her; in my opinion, it is always foolish for families to divide."

Angélique smiles at the old walnut face. "It is true, and yet, my friend," she says, cheerfully, "I think if you were Henriette, you would do as she does."

Our brown horse has been trotting fast, and we are by this time close to Caudebec. As we drive on to the quay, under the now leafless double avenue, the scene is so busy and full of life that I hardly recognize it. A number of wagons, with lofty, green hoods, are drawn up under the trees, and along the quay are ranges of booths filled with bales of cloth and merino, and shirts and jackets of the gayest patterns. Crockery, too, straggles over the quay, spread on straw, seemingly in danger of being trodden to pieces. The market men and women are still busy arranging their wares.

We drive into the inn-yard, and then I follow Angélique up a street leading off from the quay. Through the nodding, sharply-pointed, wooden gables I get an exquisite view of the beautiful gray church-spire.

Angélique bends down and whispers, "Mademoiselle will like to hear *la messe?*"

I followed her across the crowded market-place, smiling to myself. I see now why la Mère Angélique started so early from Château-Fontaine.

She does not go into the body of the church, but up the side, and, pausing, kneels down on a chair near one of the small chapels. I see that the candles on the altar of this chapel are lighted, and presently comes a little acolyte, followed by a priest, and the service begins. It is very soothing and peaceful in the early morning to hear the low-toned, sweet voices, and to see the devout faces round me; so many market-women have come in, some with full baskets stowed away carefully beside them. I forget that I cannot follow the service, and I say my prayers heartily.

It is a grand old church, with lofty arches and painted windows, and, as we come out through the great western entrance, I see a font with a quaint, richly-carved, oaken cover.

The hushed quiet of the church seems like a dream when the last baize-door has swung-to behind us, and we are in the busy, noisy crowd that throngs the Grande Place. Angélique goes on right into the middle of the market, and I follow close at her heels, bewildered by the mixed Babel of sounds, but more amused than bewildered. The Place is longer than it is broad, and the centre is filled with covered booths of fruit and vegetables. Round about are market-women with baskets, some with a pair of ducks and two fat hens, seated side by side in abject quiet; others with a couple of geese, which every now and then become obstreperous, and receive a couple of pats, and have their wings roughly tucked under them, and here, there, and everywhere, even along the pavement of the Place, stand women with shallower baskets. Some of these have picturesque gowns and quaint, high caps. As I pass, one woman pulls aside a white-cloth covering, and shows lumps of creamy and golden butter peeping out of crumpled cabbage-leaves. There are eggs and cream-cheeses in some of the other baskets. One pretty, blue-eyed girl offers me some bunches of violets and primroses, but I am afraid to stop, for the crowd closes round Angélique, and I fear to lose her as she makes her way slowly to the great stall in the centre, where a pretty, blue-eyed, fair-haired girl, without any cap on her head, the belle of the market, sits in the midst of her wares.

"Dame! la Mère Angélique, but it is a pleasure to see you once more. We thought you were going to stay in England."

"Ah, but thou art welcome, my good friend"—a smiling, rosy-cheeked, old dame toddles up and holds up her wrinkled, brown face, so that Angélique may kiss it on both sides; "and how is it with madame, and hast thou news of Mees Barbare?"

"Ah, but yes, my good mother"—Angélique looks round for me—"tiens, Marie Touchet, here is another English demoiselle for thee, and she is coming to see thee."

Marie Touchet looks at me, and makes me a courtesy, and then she says, politely:

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"Mademoiselle does not look so like an English mees as Mees Barbare has done when first she come to Château-Fontaine. I have been told" (she looks at me doubtingly) "that English ladies have long curls like the curls of Mees Barbare."

I laugh and shake my head.

"Mees Barbare does not wear long curls now, and she is very ill, so very ill, at Château-Fontaine."

"*Ah, mon Dieu!*" the old face is so tremulous with agitation that her gold ear-rings quiver like a leaf, and I see tears springing into her faded blue eyes; "is it then possible, is mademoiselle quite sure?" And then, reading confirmation in Angélique's saddened face: "Ah, but it is very sad, that fair, beautiful young lady, as gay as a bird, to think that she should be ill, and I have been hoping so often—oh, so very often, mademoiselle, to see her once more!"

"Angélique"—I take her by the arm, for a fresh group of muslin-bordered faces had collected round the tall, erect figure—"why cannot this dear old woman come up to Château-Fontaine and see Mrs. Dayrell?"

Angélique smiles, and Marie Touchet laughs heartily. I feel almost provoked with this sweet-looking old woman for being able to cry and laugh on such short notice.

"Mademoiselle does not then guess how old I am. If I live to the Saint-Jean, mademoiselle, I shall be eighty. I come into market because it is not far to come, but my traveling-days are over."

She looks so fresh and hale that it is difficult to believe in either her age or her infirmity. I wonder how she can look so cheerful. How dreadful it must be to feel even a touch of age; any weakness which suggests that power and vigor are beginning to fail! and yet Marie Touchet smiled when she said she only gets to market now.

"Are you not very sorry?" I said.

Marie Touchet's pale little eyes fix on me at once with a half-comic expression.

"But why should I be sorry? Mademoiselle sees it is God's will, so why should I trouble?"

"*Ah, çà, ma petite dame*, will she not buy some ducks? Feel them, then, the fat ducks," and a basket is put down at my feet, with two black-and-white, yellow-beaked inmates, seemingly stupefied with the noise around.

"No, no, Sophie," and Angélique pats the duck-seller on the shoulder; "we have plenty of ducks at the château. I must see if your mother has any cheeses of Pont l'Evéque."

A tall old man comes pushing roughly past us; his long gray hair hangs over his shriveled, stern face; his ragged blouse and trousers are covered with various-colored patches; he has a sack on his shoulder, and he makes his way with a long stick.

"Who is that?" I say to Marie Touchet; "he is surely very poor."

Marie laughs. "Not he, mademoiselle. Pierre Drouet is ever so rich; but he is a miser, and he comes to market not to buy, but to pick up leaves and scraps for his sack."

I wanted some more talk with Marie Touchet; but talk was difficult in the laughing, chattering, bargaining crowd of merry faces; amid the buying and selling, the chaffering and disputing, the praise and disparagement of the goods in the Place; and, as I followed Angélique to the centre, I heard fragments of news interchanged:

"Dost thou know that Annette has twins?"

"Michel Lecouvreur has been named corporal."

"And the two pigs of the Widow Dupont have died in one day. Ah! but it is sad for a widow to lose her pigs."

By this time we have reached the large vegetable-stall, but the pretty girl has vanished therefrom. A very old, white-haired woman has taken her place among pyramids of red cabbage and bunches of silver leeks, ranged round creamy cauliflowers, set in tempting rows. The border to all, and, indeed, the chief vegetable in the market, besides the innumerable brown sacks of potatoes, is a profusion of cabbages. Bunches of white and pale-purple Spanish radish give a variety here and there; and so do little heaps of white-satin-skinned beans, and long trailing yellow feathers of barbe-de-capucin, and bunches of broad-leaved endive and lettuce. I had no idea that vegetables could be made to look so pretty. There are a few pumpkins, and some baskets of apples; but these occupy a small space compared with the vegetables.

I compliment the old woman on the arrangement of her stall. She laughed, and showed a mouth empty of teeth.

"Is it, then, pretty? *Ma foi!* I am glad that it gives pleasure to mademoiselle. But mademoiselle knows that it is quite as easy to make things pretty as ugly. Pretty things

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are most attractive, and it is not only I who think so." Here she shoots a comical glance at Angélique, and bursts out laughing.

"Bonjour, Monsieur Poireau," says Angélique. She is courtesying to a tall, overdressed young man, who evidently thinks himself very handsome.

But, in spite of his shining black whiskers and gorgeous necktie, Monsieur Alphonse Poireau looks shy and ill at ease when he meets the gaze of the laughing old face behind the vegetables.

"Tenez, Madame Chéron" — he looks straight into the cabbages—"I may be mistaken, but it appears to me that the granddaughter of Marie Touchet is not in the market this morning."

Madame Chéron shoots another glance at Angélique, and her old double chin waggles with delight.

"*Aha, mon beau monsieur!* there are others with sharper eyes than you. The little Fifine has been here two hours and more; why, she kept my stall for a good half-hour. *Tiens!* it is not many minutes since I saw her start to go home on her donkey, with one truss of straw in front and another behind." Monsieur Alphonse gives an uneasy start. "Ah! I am seventy-six, Monsieur Alphonse; but, you see, I keep my eyes open, and—"

"But—pardon if I interrupt you, madame—but which way did Mademoiselle Fifine go? Did she take the lower or the upper road to St.-Arnould?"

"*Ciel!* what a pity!" She laughs merrily. "I would have remarked, if I had thought monsieur would be so anxious. But, never mind. We will ask Monsieur Leroux, when he comes back, for he was going the same way with Fifine."

There is a little chorus of laughter round the stall; even Angélique smiles at Monsieur Poireau's look of annoyance as he turns away; but she shakes her head at the mischievous old vegetable-seller.

"Ah, Madame Chéron! you are hard on the poor youth. Remember, his father is as rich as Leroux, and he cannot understand why little Fifine should prefer an ugly man like Monsieur Léon."

"I agree with Fifine," says the naughty old woman; then, with a mischievous look at me: "Would not mademoiselle prefer a plain lover, who thought only of her, to a handsome lover, who was taken up with his own face? Ah, yes! there is no doubt; it is not a man's face that a girl cares for."

She shrugs her shoulders, and goes on selling her cabbages.

CHAPTER XLII.

A MYSTERY.

When we reached the inn, we found that the *table d'hôte* was overcrowded, and breakfast had been set for us by ourselves in a small sitting-room.

"It is more *comme il faut* for mademoiselle," the tall, rigid-looking mistress said. Angélique smiled and thanked her, but I was disappointed; I thought it would have been very amusing to see so many French people together.

However, we should not have had much time, for Angélique was in a hurry to get to her charge, and we drove home at a much quicker rate than we had come. Madame Vagnon passed us on the way, but she was alone this time; she called out to Angélique that she had left Henriette in Caudebec.

"I should like to see Henriette again," I said, as Madame Vagnon drove into the orchard of La Maison Blanche. "She looks as if she had a story in her face."

"I do not think so" (Angélique gave one of her provoking smiles); "I think she has only a story of patience to tell, and, as she does not think she is patient, she would not talk of herself at all; she has suffered and worked hard all her life."

"And she never complains," said old Mathieu; "but perhaps"—his eyes twinkled—"if she had such rheumatism as I have, she would complain sometimes."

I ran up to Madame La Peyre's room as soon as we reached the château. She spent a great deal of her time in her bedroom, and I was eager to tell her about the market. It was wonderful to feel so fresh and bright from such a little change. I seemed to have so much to tell.

Madame La Peyre listened and smiled, and finally laughed heartily when I came to the discomfiture of Monsieur Alphonse Poireau. But she was not like herself; she was so guarded and her words seemed to be studied. She has never been quite as she used to be since Captain Brand went away.

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"Are they gone?" I said, "and how did poor Mrs. Dayrell bear the parting?"

Madame La Peyre sighed.

"Henri has gone, and Barbara is better than we feared she would be, but my brother says there will be a reaction; he is with her now."

"Monsieur l'Abbé! I thought he was to go with Mr. Dayrell?"

I spoke impulsively; I was so very much surprised at this sudden change of plans. Only yesterday Madame La Peyre had said that it would be cruel to let Mr. Dayrell travel by himself.

As I looked at her I saw Madame La Peyre avoid my eyes, and a look of confusion spread over her face.

"The abbé is here, my child," she repeated, "and he is with my poor Barbara."

I do not know why this should have troubled me so much, but it did. Madame La Peyre was not changeable, and I should have thought the abbé still less so, and I had heard him say that his presence in Paris was necessary.

I did not see him till dinner-time, and then he was in a provokingly formal mood. I knew that he was thinking of something else each time that he spoke to me. Madame tried to be gay and pleasant, but her cheerfulness was forced.

Every moment strengthened in me the feeling that something was going wrong, that both the abbé and Madame La Peyre were keeping some secret from me.

All at once the abbé roused himself and turned to me.

"Mademoiselle" — whenever the abbé smiles in that bland, formal way at me, I feel rebellious, as if I were being managed—"it appears that you have much liked our market."

"Yes, monsieur. I should like to go again; or, perhaps, I would rather go and see Mademoiselle Henriette, and Marie Touchet, and that dear old Madame Chéron."

"Yes, certainly," the courteous old gentleman gave me an approving smile, which I felt to be undeserved, "it would be very kind."

"Pardon, monsieur; but I believe I only wish to see them for my own amusement. I like to be amused, and Henriette interests me, and Marie puzzles me, and Madame Chéron makes me laugh."

He looked touched, and he spoke in his old, fatherly manner.

"Yes, my child, you are right; and you want all these things to occupy your mind. This is a very sad house just now for a young girl. What do you say to a journey up the Seine to Dieppedale? Madame La Peyre's cousin lives in a charming country-house beside the river; and, if you are willing, I think the change will do you and my sister good."

I looked quickly at Madame La Peyre. It had struck me at once that it would be strange for her to leave Château-Fontaine while Mrs. Dayrell continued so ill; and I saw trouble in her face. What was all this unspoken mystery which I now saw concerned me, or why should they wish to take me from Château-Fontaine? I felt ready to say that I must know the meaning of it; and that I specially disliked mysteries; and then I checked myself in confusion. What right have I to dislike mysteries, who have so lately given up a lengthened-out deceit?

A passionate longing comes to me to throw my arms round Madame La Peyre and tell her all that has happened between me and Captain Brand. Till now, such a confession has seemed impossible; but something has changed the light in which I regarded her. Either the restraint that has grown up in our former easy intercourse has surrounded her with greater dignity, or the new light in which I see myself changes the light in which I see others; but to-day, as I sit looking at Madame La Peyre's sweet, troubled face, I begin to think I have been presumptuous, and that, if I had relied more on her guidance and less on my own, I should have acted more wisely; so that my rebellious feelings slip away under this rising wave of tenderness, and I say, gently:

"If madame wishes me to go to Dieppedale, I should like it."

"*Merci, ma bonne amie;*" tears spring into her sweet old dark eyes, and she puts out her hand to me as I sit near her at table. "Then, Père Alphonse, I will write to Cécile, and tell her to expect us the day after to-morrow."

"The day after to-morrow will be Monday, and the boat does not leave Havre for Rouen till Tuesday, my sister," the abbé says. "You had better say you will be at Dieppedale on Tuesday evening, Eugénie."

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"*Bien*," says Madame La Peyre, and she rises from table.

The passages were dark at Château-Fontaine, for the oil-lamp in the middle of the hall burned dimly, and did not cast much light up the square well of the staircase and the gallery which surrounded it, and, although the days were lengthening, still, at seven o'clock, there was little daylight left. As we groped our way up the broad staircase, I put my arm round Madame La Peyre's waist, and kissed her on both cheeks.

"I am so glad," I whispered, "that I am going to get you all to myself."

We were passing Mrs. Dayrell's door.

"My poor Barbara," she said, with a sigh.

"Yes, yes, it is very selfish of me; but, madame, do not let us go away if it makes you anxious to leave her."

She went on to the *salon*, and, when we reached the door, she said:

"I shall not stay away long, and we are not going far, and Angélique is more necessary to Barbara than I am; and, besides, my dear, I will not deceive thee—I cannot explain it, my dear child, but—but it is necessary that I should take thee away from Château-Fontaine."

"Necessary! Why? O madame! will you not tell me? Is it because you fear I shall be foolish and self-willed? I do not wonder; I have wanted to tell you how sorry I am."

I had nestled my head on her shoulder; it was so much easier to tell her with both my arms round her, and my face hidden.

"Come in," she said, gently, and she closed the *salon* door upon us; "do not distress yourself, my Gertrude; I cannot explain—I must not."

"No, no, and it does not distress me to say this; it makes me happier. Of course I should like best to know what all this means, but I want to try and show you that I am in earnest to be better, and that I will be guided by you; only, if you really prefer not to leave Mrs. Dayrell, I promise to do just what you tell me, if you will only trust me."

I felt a choking come into my voice, and I stopped, for I wanted to be calm and reasonable; but Madame La Peyre was as much agitated as I was.

"My poor, dear, tormented child; my dear little one"—she kissed me tenderly, and I felt the tears on her cheeks—"I trust *thee* entirely; if it were only thy affairs, we need not go away from Château-Fontaine; but—*ah, mon Dieu!*—kiss me, my child, and let me go to Barbara, or I shall say the very thing I ought to keep silent about."

CHAPTER XLIII.

BY MOONLIGHT.

When I got to my room that night I was too much excited to sleep.

I saw no more of Madame La Peyre. The abbé brought me a message that his sister had found Mrs. Dayrell restless, and would stay beside her till she fell asleep, but that I was not to sit up.

"And, indeed," the courteous old gentleman went on to say, "after such a fatiguing day, my dear child, you require extra sleep, or we shall have you lose some of your brightness."

This sounded like a dismissal, so I said, "Good-night!" and departed.

No wonder that Mrs. Dayrell was restless; the night was so wild; the wind went howling round the château, like a lioness robbed of her young one; the moon, nearly at the full, gave only a fitful light, so quickly were the lines of black cloud whirled across its pale surface. I sat down at my window and watched it—sometimes veiled in a film of gauzy black, sometimes with dark cloud-lines drawn across its disk—far more interesting than when its cold, calm outline showed undisturbed.

The trees waved wildly, the larches bent beneath the gusts as if they would touch the ground.

I heard a sharp cry, "Tuwhit! tuwhit! tuwhit!" and then a huge monster, with wide-stretched wings, swooped past the moon and circled round the angle of the house, as if it were weaving spells.

I felt in harmony with this tumult outside the house. The day had been so full of incident and variety, so totally different from all the months of quiet days that had gone before, that it seemed as if I could not shake off the excitement. One face after another passed before me, till my brain felt like a kaleidoscope of constantly-changing and broken pictures. First came Fifine and her two lovers. I wish I had seen Léon Leroux,

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who loves the pretty girl so much, and whom she loves better than that conceited Monsieur Poireau. A warm flush rises in my cheeks. Are all Frenchmen vain? I knew I thought Eugène was a little—just a very little; but, then, the abbé, even, is rather vain, and so was Mr. Newton; perhaps all men are vain. "No, they are not," I answer myself, quite angrily. "No, Captain Brand is not the least bit vain; he never thinks of himself at all."

With the thought of Captain Brand comes a sudden, new idea. Is it he who is coming to Château-Fontaine? and does he so shrink from me that it is considered advisable to take me away? The thought is so intensely humbling that I crouch down in my white-dimity-covered chair, and hide my eyes with my hands. I forget the clouded moon and the whirling tree-branches; even the swooping owl, though its sharp cry still reaches my ears.

Oh, what can I do to make him see that I am sorry—that I am not really so unworthy as he thinks?

But that is the doubt. Am I not still unworthy? I may have passed through a change of feeling, but that may be only self-imaginings and morbidity. I have done nothing since I saw him to prove my repentance for all that foolish deceit.

I get up and look out of window. I so long to find something I can do, that outward movement is a relief.

How the clouds have gathered! the moon has risen so much higher that I see far off the silver sheen of the river; above is a black, rough mass of clouds, and now a broad line of black stretches across the sky, and, curving upward in the centre of the moon, sits brooding like a huge bat, half obscuring its light. Above the black, lowering cloud the sky is a mottled mass of gray and silver. How immense is all this beauty! I feel an atom as I think how many millions are perhaps gazing at the marvelous sight. I sit gazing while all this changes; the black, swooping bat-pinions sail away, the heavy mass spreads, and lightens, and sinks below the moon, and, as it sinks, its edges whiten and then glow like burnished copper, only for a while, and a fleecy, paler cloud-wreath obscures the moon, the sky above is a clear dark blue, with stars gemming it at intervals, and below there is a quiet range of gray, which seems to say the storm has passed over us.

I knelt down and said my prayers, and when I rose up I felt calmer, but still very sleepless.

I am quite resigned to do whatever Madame La Peyre wishes, but still, for all that, I cannot help wanting to know why we are going away.

That thought about Captain Brand was only a folly, because, of course, the abbé could easily have met him in Paris.

Oh, I see it now! How dull I was not to guess instantly! The blood rushes up to my forehead, and sets my heart beating with excitement. It is Eugène who is expected to arrive at Château-Fontaine.

I walk up and down my room faster and faster. I could not think; I was confused with the torrent of contradictory feeling that swelled in my heart. All the good resolutions—all the patience and self-control I had been trying so hard for—were swept away by a sudden flood of youth and joyful gladness. I shall be young again now. Ah, yes; he is so young that he will understand me, and I shall be happy again. Why, I am happy already! All this sadness and heaviness has come because I have been living with old people; there can never be full sympathy while there is this difference in age.

My heart smites me hard in the midst of this burst of joy. Who could have shown me myself so truly without full sympathy? Am I going to prove myself worthy to Captain Brand by ingratitude to all those who have borne with me so patiently? Am I going to be what I have been so often—resolute only in theory? No, I will not be ungrateful.

I sit thinking a long, long time. At last I hear the old clock outside strike twelve. The moon has sunk; there is no light now, and I feel a sudden chill of terror. I grope to my table, but I cannot find the matches directly; and, when I do find them, and strike a light, I am standing just in front of a tall mirror, and I start back with a cry at the sight of my own white face.

When both my candles are lighted I feel wonderfully soothed; there is a very calming influence in light—a sort of common-sense reasoning comes with it which seems to depart in the darkness.

I do not think Captain Brand would blame

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me for that sudden rush of joy at the prospect of seeing Eugène; but still I am not easy in this joy, and I know now why this uneasiness came with the happier feelings. I learned it while I sat waiting in the darkness.

I will be very frank with Eugène. I will tell him that I had no thought of loving him till that sad, foolish moment when he put it into my head. But he is not to blame, because he thought I was free. I do not suppose I ever should have cared so much for him if he had not written me those letters. But, if I was wrong to receive them—and I have grown to believe that I was wrong—then I shall be equally wrong if I let Eugène talk of love to me till I am free of this marriage. I cannot help caring for him and thinking of him; that may be wrong, too, but I cannot help it. And yet I feel so shy and timid at the thought of meeting him, that I am anxious to leave Château-Fontaine. Captain Brand has said, no doubt, that Eugène and I are not to meet. Well, he might have trusted me—at least I think so. I do not fancy this shrinking can be a mere imagination.

But I can go to bed now. I have made up my mind what to do, and I think I shall sleep.

This resolution is, perhaps, no self-denial to me; but still it will certainly vex Eugène when he knows it, and make him, perhaps, very angry; and it will be very painful to make him angry when he loves me so dearly, poor, dear fellow! I shall ask him to be angry only with me, and I must try to bear it. At least this is something I can do for Captain Brand, but I scarcely know how it is to be told.

I have not answered Eugène's last letter, or written to him about his mother's death. I cannot; and now there will be no chance of seeing him. I suppose, as Angélique says, I must be patient.

CHAPTER XLIV.

A VISITOR.

It was Sunday—only a fortnight ago—when I sat watching the moon and the black clouds that hurled themselves across its light. Were those clouds dumb heralds of the sorrow and trouble that were coming? Till today, I have not felt able to set down a word of what has happened at Château-Fontaine, and, as I look back over the days, some of them seem as far off already as though a year had come between.

That Sunday was a bright day, full of pleasant anticipation. As we came home from church, Madame La Peyre told me about her friend's charming villa at Dieppedale, just a little way beyond Canteleu, which is famous for its view of the city of Rouen. I had a longing to see Rouen, and wondered whether the quiet old lady of Dieppedale ever drove so far.

"She will love you dearly, Gertrude, because you are English," madame said, as we climbed the steep hill again. "She was an *emigrée*, and she has never forgotten the kindness she received in England."

I had never paid a visit of this kind before, and in the afternoon I lay in wait for Angélique on the stairs, to consult her about my wardrobe. There is a room at the end of that long, narrow passage leading off from the hall, which is called Angélique's room, but she is never in it. Twice when I have gone to seek her there, I have found Rosalie knitting a long, blue stocking, and looking as malevolent as a witch in her cell.

At last Mrs. Dayrell's door opened, and Angélique came out. She put up a warning finger directly she saw me, and her face was even more sad than it usually is when she leaves her patient. She turned at once to my bedroom; she seemed always to know my wants.

"Mademoiselle is not to trouble about her packing," she said, holding the door open for me; "if she will just put out her books or any thing she wants specially, the rest will all be ready."

But she did not smile, and she seemed anxious to leave me.

"What is it? is Mrs. Dayrell worse?"

"Yes, mademoiselle, I am afraid she is worse; there is a great change, and I cannot soothe her. I am going to find Monsieur l'Abbé; my poor madame says that Monsieur Dayrell must be brought back at once."

"But, Angélique, we cannot go away if she is worse; it would be dreadful to leave her. I will go and tell Madame La Peyre."

Angélique shook her head.

"Pardon, mademoiselle, but it is always best to let things be. Mademoiselle is not

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to go till Tuesday, and we do not know what may happen before Tuesday."

She went away, and I sat with those words echoing in my ears, "We do not know what may happen before Tuesday."

And yet I have remarked that, as a rule, when one feels a dread, or what one calls a presentiment of evil, it is groundless. I said this to myself, and went back again to the thought of our journey.

In the evening, madame told me she thought Mrs. Dayrell was better.

"I think the stormy wind last night troubled her, and we must expect that she will feel her husband's absence. I am sorry he went"—her sweet old face clouded over—"I think he did my poor Barbara much more good than any doctor will ever do her, but he thought it would please her to see an English doctor."

"No"—Madame La Peyre spoke with unusual quickness—"no, my dear child; Barbara is too fond of talking to you, and she always excites herself when she sees you; you are much more lively and interesting, my little one, than Angélique and I are, and therefore you are not so harmless for our invalid."

I felt disappointed. I wished much to see Mrs. Dayrell, if it were only to efface the remembrance of her sad, wild face, and of those despairing words.

I wonder why I linger over all these trivialities. I believe because I dread to put down deliberately the story of the next day—the Monday which was to work such a change in my life.

When I woke up and looked out, there was a soft mist over every thing. The fine tracing of the topmost tree-branches peered over it like phantoms, their trunks and lower branches being as yet shrouded in its veil. As it cleared away, the sun shone out brilliantly, and there was that soft sweetness in the air which seems to make one feel happy and languid all at once, and which only comes with the first burst of spring.

As soon as I was ready, I ran downstairs, and very soon I had gathered a large handful of violets; the shrubbery was purple with their exquisite flowers and buds hiding away among the leaves; there were lilies of the valley, too, not in blossom, but their lovely leaves looked fresh and delicate against the rich brown mould.

I gathered some of these leaves, and put them round my violets, but they did not suit them, and I threw them away—there is no use in mismatching things, I thought; Nature always knows what will go well together—it is only man who makes mistakes. I began to wonder if Nature meant to match Mr. and Mrs. Dayrell; certainly they are not a well-suited pair—she ought to have a phlegmatic husband, who would laugh at her caprices; and he ought to have a sweeter, gentler wife. Marriage seems to be a great and awful puzzle; and I thought of my father and my mother, who had married for love, and yet who always looked sad and anxious. Had not my mother said they had been selfish in marrying?

I walked slowly up from the shrubbery toward the house, and I went in and sat down on the lowest step of the broad staircase, to make up my violets into bunches.

Presently, Rosalie passed across the hall. She stopped and looked at me, but I took no notice.

"Mademoiselle should not sit on the stairs—there are visitors arriving."

She stood looking at me through her sandy eyelashes, her hands spread out on her hips.

I thought she was only teasing me, and went on picking out the largest blossoms for a special offering to Madame La Peyre; and then, all in a moment, I heard footsteps crunching on the ground outside.

Rosalie said: "Mamzelle—Mamzelle Stewart, n'y a pas temps à perdre." And I found myself running up-stairs with my lap full of flowers.

Instead of going on to my own room, I stopped at the abbé's study, and tapped at the door.

"Entrez," in Madame La Peyre's voice. She and the abbé were standing near the fireplace, and I fancied they looked disturbed.

"Pardon," I said; and then I kissed madame, and shook hands with the abbé. I made a movement to the door. "I thought no one would be here; but I brought my violets away, because some one is coming up the terrace."

"Do not disturb thyself, ma petite—it is probably the postman, earlier than usual."

Madame La Peyre smiled, but the abbé looked grave.

"I will see," he said. "You can stay here till I come back."

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Then, in a moment, I knew what was going to happen. Light seemed to dance before my eyes as Rosalie threw open the door, crying out, in her shrill tones, "Monsieur le Comte de Vaucresson."

The abbé stood still in the middle of the room; but Madame La Peyre gave a little cry, and started up, with both hands stretched out toward the as yet unseen visitor.

He looked so very pale—his whiskers and beard so much grown—that I should not have known him, except for his eyes; and, somehow, these looked so much older that, instead of the companion of my own age I had parted from with such loving sadness, it seemed to me here was a grown-up gentleman, of whom I felt alarmingly shy.

The abbé and he embraced, and then the comte took both Madame La Peyre's hands, bowed profoundly over them, and kissed them. I had never taken my eyes from Eugène; but now, as he looked full at me, I could hardly look back—I felt my face burn, and my eyes drooped.

The comte did not attempt to shake hands; he only made me a low, formal bow, and murmured some words—one of which sounded like "madame."

"Ah, my dear friend," the abbé said, quickly, "a letter from me has crossed you: a few days, and I should have reached Paris."

Madame La Peyre looked at me, and moved to the door.

"You must have so much to say to my brother, Monsieur Eugène, that we will leave you in peace."

He opened the door so gracefully: I gave just a little look up as I went out, and I met his eyes full.

I hurried on, past Madame La Peyre. I wanted to reach my own room, but she called me back.

"Gertrude, my child, let us go down and breakfast at once. The abbé wishes to be alone with his pupil, and we shall have finished before they come."

"In a moment," I said. I had let fall most of my violets, but I still kept a bunch which wanted tying. I was going off to my room with these. I thought Madame La Peyre cruel to ask me to come to eat when I was choking with pent-up feelings. To my surprise, she said:

"I will wait for thee," and she stood still in the gallery.

I had no time to think. I felt hot one minute, and cold the next. I began to guess that the abbé had written to tell Eugène not to come, and that he had come in spite of this. He had come because he so longed to see me.

His eyes had told me that as I came out of the room; and, instead of feeling proud and glad—for he, poor, dear fellow! knows no reason why all is not as it used to be—I only felt frightened, and was glad to get away.

Well, he is here; we must see one another again, and we must come to some sort of explanation, and I shall be thankful when it is over.

"You need not wait, Matthieu," says Madame La Peyre, as soon as we are half through breakfast, and that grinning piece of laziness disappears, probably to sleep till his next summons.

"My dear Gertrude," madame speaks gravely, "thou art not eating; I suppose thou art mystified. I had better say that Eugène de Vaucresson ought not to have come here, and my brother will send him away at once. It is useless to treat thee like a child, my little one, and therefore I tell thee that it is thought better that Eugène should not see thee again."

I felt myself crimson in an instant. "Madame, I know that I have not deserved trust; but I cannot understand this; surely, if I say you can trust me now, you will believe."

My voice quivered; I could hardly keep from crying. Madame La Peyre looked troubled and disappointed. I went on as soon as I could speak steadily:

"I will tell you every thing, and then you will see that I ought to see Eu—Monsieur de Vaucresson again. You know we care for one another." The look of pain in her eyes was not to be borne, and I covered mine with my hands; I felt as if I must hide my face while I went on. "I have learned to see that I was wrong in beginning this; but then I am not sure that one can guide one's own feelings. It seems to me this feeling came of itself; but I am resolved not to consider myself engaged, or free to listen to Monsieur de Vaucresson, until Captain Brand tells me he has got our marriage set aside. I suppose that he wishes to be released as much as I do."

Madame La Peyre gave a weary little sigh.

"Yes, yes" (there was a sound of irritation in her voice that I had never heard there

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before), "I have promised not to interfere; but it is all very unreasonable, and I cannot explain to thee why it would be so much better if the captain had left things as they were. Thou art only a child still, and, *mon Dieu!* a child's faults should be forgiven and forgotten."

In the midst of my excitement I could hardly help smiling. This was, then, the secret cause of Madame La Peyre's indulgence. She considered that Captain Brand had been harsh in his decision; she did not really believe I could wish to be free.

"If thou wast a Catholic, my child, it would be almost impossible to set this marriage aside; but in thy country it may be different. Still thou must not have any thing to do with Monsieur de Vaucresson even after—"

Here she stopped with what I felt to be provoking silliness.

"I have told you every thing, madame; would it not be better to trust me?"

She shook her head so sadly, and her dear eyes filled so quickly, that I was appeased.

"I cannot, dear little one. My Gertrude, if thou askest me any more questions, I may perhaps break my promise to the Père Alphonse."

I kissed her.

"I will not ask one more question;" but I felt tortured, and my face must have shown her my trouble.

"We will go away now, Gertrude," she said; "we will stay in my room till afternoon, and I will ask if thou mayst not write thy explanation; but, indeed, my sweet child must not see Eugène de Vaucresson."

CHAPTER XLV.

AN EXPLANATION AT LAST.

I HAD lost the power of feeling. A strange change had come to me. I had been longing for months to see Eugène, and I had seen him. He was actually under the same roof with me, and yet I could bear to be separated from him, and to be told that I must not see him again.

Perhaps I did not fully believe Madame La Peyre—perhaps I hoped that the abbé would give a different judgment. Either this hope sustained me, or the suddenness of our meeting had dulled my perceptions.

Madame La Peyre volunteered to show me a new open-stitch in her embroidery, and I was able to listen, and even to learn.

At last came Angélique's well-known tap at the door, and, when she came in, she said:

"Monsieur l'Abbé will be glad to see madame, and afterward to read with mademoiselle."

"Is Monsieur le Comte gone, then?" madame asked, eagerly.

"Mais oui, madame" (Angélique's eyebrows were lifted in surprise). "It is nearly an hour since Monsieur l'Abbé has gone down to the gates with Monsieur de Vaucresson."

"Allons," said Madame La Peyre, "but, Gertrude, I am not sure about the reading; thou art so pale; a run in the park would be more pleasant—would it not, my child?"

"No, no, thank you" (I had resolved to see the abbé); "when your talk is over, I will go to the study."

"Bien;" and it seemed to me that she tripped away as if she were eager to learn all that had been happening.

I had been wishing to be left alone, for my head felt dazed, and I gave a sigh of relief as madame departed, followed by Angélique, but almost at once a sort of despair seized me.

All is then ended. I am parted from Eugène, for, even if Captain Brand succeeds in getting the marriage set aside, I cannot seek Eugène, and he is forbidden to come to Château-Fontaine.

There seems to be an inexorable fate at work. Just in this same iron manner I was prevented from speaking to Captain Brand; he will never know how I long for his forgiveness or how sorry I am, and yet I am only sorry that I was ungrateful and deceitful; if all were to happen over again, I must love Eugène, and feel only friendship for Captain Brand. It is all very well for people who marry just because they are bidden to take a husband, whose pulses have never been stirred by any quicker current than the throbs of gratified vanity, to say I could have loved Captain Brand if I had chosen. I do not believe in that sort of manufactured love; it seems to me that real love is spontaneous, and comes direct from heaven.

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I set down these thoughts, because they remain so vividly in memory; they were just the last I had before the trial came which I so shrink from writing of, and yet it is a cowardly shrinking. I suppose it is much easier to confess that one has been faulty than that one has been self-deceived.

As I recovered from the shock of Eugène's sudden departure, I began to realize my disappointment.

How many words I had planned to say! how often I had gone over in thought the scene of our meeting, and how different all had been! It seems as if Angélique's theory is true; that all the events of our lives are preordered for us; that we are only left free to choose good and evil as they present themselves. In this way I certainly might have altered my life this morning. I might have insisted on seeing Eugène again. I feel I have behaved a coward, and the torment gnaws at my heart. Madame La Peyre is right. I shall go out.

I go very slowly and sadly to my room for my hat and cloak. All the bright morning promise has faded out of the sky—light-gray clouds sail swiftly across, and join a huge bank which sits lowering on the tree-tops. There will be rain before this afternoon is over, but I am glad to see the dullness. All that I used to prize so much—brightness, and color, and beauty—has gone out of my life.

I have never found the spring in the bookcase, but I have found out a way to the foot of that staircase, and my mind is so full of Eugène that I go there involuntarily. There are still the ugly pigs, and cocks and hens, and there is Rosalie throwing grain to them. How differently different women can do the same thing! Rosalie's atmosphere seems to influence the dumb creatures; but it is quite another influence than her mother's. At Merdon the pigs used to frolic about with their tails in a coil. Here they are snarling, and trying to bite one another, and the fowls do not come clucking round Rosalie's feet; they are rushing greedily in search of every stray grain. It is possible that the creatures are not so well fed at Château-Fontaine as at Merdon. The pigs look gaunt and wretched, but I like to think of Rosalie as an emblem of discord. She sets my teeth on edge. I try to pass her silently.

"Eh bien, mademoiselle, Monsieur le Comte has not paid a long visit. Mademoiselle is the only visitor who stays at Château-Fontaine; the gentlemen all go away. It is dull for mademoiselle to live with only the old, is it not so?"

"Please to help me open this gate." I did not choose to answer—her voice and her looks were both spiteful. She plainly rejoiced in my dullness. I believe far more in the old fairy tales since I have seen Rosalie. She seems to hate every thing that is young and bright.

I had not been this way since the burst of spring came. When I reached the opening in the hedge of the little Dutch garden, and looked down on the hanging wood and at the trees across the river, I saw how great a change had passed over all. The tender green leaves unrolled themselves under my very eyes, and one heard the soft, indefinable sound of dropping sheaths. It was too early in the day for the evening song of the birds, but the air was full of murmur. Some of the flower-beds in the garden were empty of all but rich, brown mould, and standard rose-trees, full of delicate, red-stemmed leaves in the centre; others were gay with red and yellow tulips, and some were full of basil and other sweet herbs. The high hedge went all around the garden, shutting it in completely from the long stretch of potato-and-cabbage ground which lay between it and the offices of the château, but there were no trees this way, and I turned again to the woods. There was something healing to my trouble in the exquisite, tender green, in the visible gush of renewed life. Far below, the river-bank opposite was gemmed with wild-flowers, and beyond these was a carpet of rich golden blossoms sitting on dark-green leaves. How lovely it all was, and how little did any dweller at Château-Fontaine seem to care for its loveliness—it was deserted! It has always been a mystery to me how the garden and shrubberies were kept in order—they seemed so solitary. Matthieu was far too lazy to handle a rake, and there were only his father, the *concierge*, and a still older man—Baptiste—attached to the place. Baptiste was so deaf, that, after one vain attempt to make him hear, I had given up any effort at speech, and contented myself with nodding and smiling if by chance I saw him at work. As I stood looking down at the wood, I saw something moving through it. Some one was coming up the path. It might be Baptiste, but as I looked I saw that the branches were

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moved too roughly and rapidly. Whoever was coming, came at full speed. My heart began to beat fast. In a minute the trees near the top were violently pushed apart, and I saw that it was Eugène. He was flushed, and his eyes sparkled with eagerness.

"My charming friend!" He came up close beside me, and took my hand.

All my shyness came back, and I shrank a little away from him.

"We cannot talk here," he said, "we are sure to be interrupted; the wood on the other side is much better."

The mention of that wood brought back vividly my meeting with Captain Brand. I could not go there and talk with Eugène, and with this recollection came back, too, my resolution. But why need I keep it? I had spoken of it to Madame La Peyre, but I had made no pledge to Captain Brand. Why should I interfere, and dash away the happiness of two people? My head felt in a whirl. All I had been striving so hard for grew unreal and impossible. Standing there beside me, he seemed to absorb my will. I felt in that moment that I must let him decide my fate.

I looked up at him.

I can never tell what it was, or how I could have learned it so quickly, but I knew in an instant that I was not looking at *my* Eugène. I shivered and drew my hand away, and then I looked again. Yes, it was the same face; there was the same lovely hair curling over his white forehead, the same haughty, graceful pose of the head. He had more beard, and this, doubtless, changed him; but the change in his eyes was something quite different: they were—I cannot find words to paint the change I felt. I could not keep mine fixed on them — their look brought the blood into my face.

"Do you not think so?" he said, softly, and then I understood he was waiting for my answer.

"We can talk here very well, I think; we shall not be interrupted." And then I summoned up my courage, and tried to remember that I had longed for this meeting—here was the opportunity I had desired. "I wanted to see you very much: I was so unhappy when they said you were gone!"

I spoke earnestly, but I did not look up. I longed to get rid of the nightmare feeling which insisted that this was not the Eugène I had been cherishing like an idol. I wanted to believe against myself.

"My sweet friend!" — ah me, at the sound of his voice hope came back. Yes, he was Eugène—no one else had ever spoken to me in tones that stole into my heart, and set it throbbing wildly—"this is indeed a pleasure I hardly dared to hope for! When I saw you this morning I feared I was forgotten."

"No, oh, no; you thought so because I did not write in answer to your last letter, but I will tell you all about that; that is one reason why I so much wished to see you."

I spoke very earnestly, but he laughed.

"Dear Gertrude," he said so very tenderly that the tears came against my will, "never mind the letters; we are together at last. I knew you would come; I have been waiting in the wood this hour for you."

I started at this.

"Why could you not have insisted on seeing me at the château?" I said, gravely. I wanted him to understand that I did not mean to keep this meeting secret.

I looked up and saw that he was smiling.

"My sweet little friend, they have been moping you; tell me now—I promise to be discreet—have not madame and that dragon of virtue, la Mère Angélique, been trying to make you into a *femme raisonnable?* I know you have been *triste à mourir* in that dreadful Devonshire"—he said the word so prettily that I could not help laughing. "Yes, yes, I thought so; and, now that the dear little victim has her Eugène again, she will forget all these foolish worries, and be gay and charming, as she was last year."

I shook my head.

"You cannot think how long ago last year seems," I said; "so much has happened since then." Somehow I could not feel gay and happy, and I saw that my grave manner vexed him. "You must be patient with me," I went on; "I cannot feel natural till I have explained every thing."

He gave a little impatient frown, and shrugged his shoulders.

"My friend, it is your English blood which torments you. In France, when we have a trouble or a grief, we do not brood over it and hatch it into more stinging life; we turn from it, we try to shake it off, we fly it as we would fly from a serpent. I come to you to-

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day for distraction, for amusement; why, then, should we explain? and why should you wrinkle your charming forehead in trying to tell me any thing but that you love me? That is all I want to hear, dear Gertrude; your eyes say so, and I want to hear your words confirm it. Come, we will go and find the boat, and we will be as joyous as we were last year."

While I listened I kept changing; I did not like his words; the idea of shrinking from grief shocked me, and the next moment I felt full of remorse; for I could not do as he had asked me; I could not say I loved him. I was growing colder and colder. Be as joyous as last year, when Eugène seemed to me perfection? Impossible! What was coming to me? And then I told myself it was the false position in which I stood that made him seem different, and that I must be brave, and tell him the truth at once.

"Please listen"—I looked at him very entreatingly, and he bent down and whispered fond nonsense about my eyes, which I knew it was wrong to listen to—"I cannot go in the boat to-day, and you will see why. Has the abbé told you any thing about me?"

He smiled and bowed, mockingly.

"Not any thing that I did not know before, madame."

I felt my face flush suddenly.

"Why do you call me madame?"

"Is it not the truth?" he said, in English.

"Yes; but how did you know it? That is what I wanted to tell you; until I—" I stopped here, a strange mixture of feelings checked my words.

Eugène took my hand and kissed it. I felt angry, and I hastily drew it away.

"Ah," he said, sadly, "you are offended, and you will not let me be happy. Dear Gertrude, you are unkind, and you are my only friend; you know my sorrow. I came to you to be cheered and consoled, and you treat me like a criminal; what have I done that I may not love you as I loved you last year?"

"I am very sorry for your loss, indeed I am; but last year you thought I was free; it is not you who are to blame; it is all my fault; I have no right to expect you to be better than I was, then."

"My dear little friend" (my tears troubled him), "do not be so much too earnest; life is not given that we should make ourselves miserable; we have only to enjoy; even Angélique will tell you that her *bon Dieu* likes us to be happy. You are married now; but you have an old husband, who will very often be away from you, as he is a sailor; surely he is not so barbarous as to deny you the consolation of a friend?"

I stared at him. Had I been mistaken all through? Was it only friendship that Eugène felt for me? I do not know whether I was mortified or relieved for the first minute, and then I blushed with shame; my vanity had indeed led me into error. But a rapid thought came—if Eugène only wished for my friendship, why was I not allowed to see him?

"Every woman wants a friend," he went on, "and you specially need one. And I, too, have no friend, dear Gertrude; consider me a little; I claim your love as a right; remember, you have given it to me."

I looked up frankly, but I quickly looked down again; I think Eugène deceived himself about his friendship.

"Friendship and love are different," I said; "and, when you marry, your wife will not like our friendship."

"Marry!" he laughed. "Marriage is in the future, dear Gertrude. I shall not marry till I am older than your captain is, and then my wife will be too well bred to interfere with my friendships."

I stood silent. It is true, then, that Eugène loves me, or he would not talk in this way.

"I was married to Captain Brand against my will," I said, "but we have agreed to set this marriage aside; we both wish to be free."

I had been half reluctant to say this. Certainly, if Eugène was what he now seemed to be, I could not love him; and yet hope kept on whispering that, if he saw a chance of winning me, he would be once more all I had dreamed him to be.

He shrugged his shoulders.

"It is a mistake, dear Gertrude, to do this; I have seen more of life than you have, and those marriages are the best where the husbands and wives see least of one another. In France a marriage is a marriage always; there is no possibility of change; and for a woman marriage is a good institution—it gives her position and it gives her freedom. In

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England it may be different, but in France an unmarried girl may not have a friend who is not of her own sex; it is 'shocking,' as you say in English."

"Then how could you ask me to—to be your friend last year?" I said, indignantly.

He tried to take my hand, but I drew it away.

"You are too hasty, and yet you look so pretty when you are angry; there, now, how shall I calm you, my sweet friend? If peaches fall at our feet it is not robbery to pick them up; would you have had me so boorish and brutal as not to enjoy what came of itself?"

I turned away, writhing; every word was stabbing my own folly into my heart. Eugène followed me, and an earnestness came at last into the playful tone which so goaded me.

"Listen, Gertrude, and do not blame yourself. You were a sweet, innocent child, and you acted like a child. When I learned the story of your marriage, I knew that you had acted rightly; you were free, and, unless your husband was a tyrant, he had no right to blame you. But now, listen again. We are foolish; all this time we have been disputing, when we might have been happy talking to each other the gay nothings we talked last year. Why should we be grave and serious about trifles? You are free to amuse yourself, my angel. No one at Château-Fontaine has any more right to direct you than I have; and I have, have I not, dearest Gertrude, the right of love?"

He clasped my hand so firmly this time that I felt I could not draw it away without a struggle.

"Eugène, please let me go," I said, calmly; "you and I can never understand one another, and I am sure we must not meet again. You are not what I have thought you, but I have no right to be angry, because I have been wrong too."

He did not answer; he kept looking toward the wood. Presently he dropped my hand with an exclamation.

"I told you we should be interrupted," he said, pettishly; "here comes some one; you have still time to get away, Gertrude. A—h! it is the abbé; but he will not reach us for several minutes yet."

"I shall stay," I said, coldly.

"As you will;" he shrugged his shoulders. "I should have thought it better to avoid an *esclandre*."

"You said just now I was my own mistress, and could do as I pleased; I have done nothing wrong—why should there be an *esclandre*?"

I spoke so bitterly that he turned and looked at me.

"You are so charming," he said, "that I am sure in the end you will be guided by me. You will have a letter from me to-morrow."

"No—no more letters."

I eagerly watched the movement in the trees. I had felt suffocated with anger and mortification; but all the other feelings changed into thankfulness when the abbé at last stood beside me.

He looked at us inquiringly.

"Monsieur," I said, hurriedly, "will you take me to the château?"

"I will follow you instantly, my daughter." He gave me a grave bow, as if to dismiss me. "I want to talk to you when I have spoken to Monsieur le Comte de Vaucresson."

I did not even look at Eugène, but hurried back to the château.

CHAPTER XLVI.

THE DARK HOURS.

I WENT so fast that I had not much time to think; but yet even in those few moments I had gathered that I had something to learn from the abbé. Only he could have told Eugène the fact of my marriage; and it was his knowledge of Eugène's feelings that had made him forbid our meeting. But I told myself, as I hurried through the gates, that I must not think of Eugène until I had talked with the abbé. I felt so harsh about Eugène, and yet, after all, I might have mistaken his meaning. I must be capricious and shallow, or I could not have changed so quickly.

I had reached the pig-yard; the gate leading into it was so very heavy that I could hardly push it open. I stood still after one effort, and then I found I was trembling violently; my knees knocked together, and I caught at the gate to save myself from falling.

While I stood trying to recover strength, Rosalie came hurrying across the yard.

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"*Tiens*, how can mademoiselle stand idle when the poor madame is dying! I run to find Monsieur l'Abbé; has mademoiselle seen him?"

"He is in the flower-garden."

She had wrenched open the gate, and was out of sight before I was able to take in her words.

Then I ran round to the front of the house, in the hope of finding Matthieu; but the entrance-hall was empty, and, when I reached Mrs. Dayrell's room, though the outer door stood open, there was not a sound.

Dying! Was she really dying? I had seen death once, and I shrank from it, and yet I felt impelled to push the inner door open and look in.

Madame La Peyre sat at the head of the bed, but her face was buried in her pocket-handkerchief. Angélique knelt near her, reciting prayers in so low a voice that the sound had not penetrated through the door. But she heard my entrance, and looked at me over her shoulder.

I did not know what to do, so I knelt down and prayed for Mrs. Dayrell. In my ignorance, my most fervent prayer for her, and that which came first, was that she might be spared to her husband.

Suddenly there came such a shriek of agony that involuntarily I stopped my ears. I knelt on, stupefied; but I saw that neither Madame La Peyre nor Angélique seemed frightened, though Madame La Peyre looked terribly distressed.

Angélique rose up gently and took a wineglass which Madame La Peyre fetched her from a little table in the middle of the room.

Presently I heard Mrs. Dayrell's voice; it was very faint and weak.

"Pardon, Eugénie; the pain came so suddenly, I could not bear it. I am glad Henri cannot hear me make a baby of myself."

It was awful to hear her speak jestingly just after that terrible cry; but the poor thing did it to soothe Madame La Peyre.

No more words were said. I was almost afraid to breathe lest the knowledge of my presence should disturb Mrs. Dayrell.

"Angélique," she said, at last, "send your mistress away. Let Gertrude come. She will not suffer as thou dost, my poor Eugénie, and it makes it worse for me."

"No, no, my Barbara."

But Madame La Peyre broke down sobbing, and Angélique shook her head. She turned and looked at me, and then at the door. I felt instinctively that Angélique was the person to be obeyed, and I went up to Madame La Peyre and put my arm round her.

"Come away," I whispered; "I will take your place, and you shall come back when she is better."

She shrank away a little; but then, with her usual gentleness, she yielded, and I took her to the abbé's studio and sat her down in the chair in which I once fell asleep. She did not seem fit to be left alone, and, though the abbé was not there, I felt sure he would be in directly.

While I lingered watching her, Madame La Peyre raised her head.

"Go back, Gertrude; Angélique wants help. I will stay here and pray for my poor Barbara."

When I returned to the sick-room, Mrs. Dayrell was speaking.

"Angélique, why do you not answer me? How much more of this pain can I live through? It must not kill me till I see Henri again."

I could not hear Angélique's answer. She was bending over the suffering woman.

"Bah, bah!"—Mrs. Dayrell's voice was hoarse and broken, as if she spoke with difficulty—"you propose an impossibility. I cannot offer what I do not accept. If I rebel against pain, how can I make an offering of it? Tell me that I deserve every shiver of this pain, and I believe you. I deserve it, and yet I rebel against it. If it were not that I must live and see Henri, I would snatch that opiate out of your hand, and drink it all!"

I trembled with actual fear. I saw Angélique cross herself, and then she quietly looked over her shoulder and pointed to the door. I did not think till then that she knew I was in the room; but Mrs. Dayrell had seen the gesture, and understood it.

"Do not send Gertrude away—it is Gertrude, is it not? Why," she went on, in a lower voice, to Angélique, "if you want to check this talk, which shocks you, let the child stop; she is more restraint than a hardened old saint like you."

Hearing this, I went up to the bed, and drew aside the muslin bed-curtains. She was

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terribly changed since I had last seen her; her features looked so much larger, and the skin seemed tightly drawn across her face; all her long hair had been cut away, and perhaps its absence gave a harsher expression.

"Gertrude"—she held out her hand; it was so cold and clammy that its touch made me shiver—"you used to talk learnedly at Merdon about the power of the will. Now tell me, child, is my will strong enough to keep me alive till my husband comes back?"

I did not know how to answer. This way of talking seemed to me unsuitable in a dying woman. I looked at Angélique, but she turned away her head.

"Mr. Dayrell has been gone more than two days; he will soon return," I said, "and you will get better."

"Speak the truth, Gertrude, or I shall send you away. You do not really think I shall get better. Every one of these spasms leaves me weaker than the last. After all, it is mere selfishness; it will make Henri miserable to see me die. I had better get it over before he comes back."

"Don't, oh, please don't talk so!" I cried; and I felt the hot tears rolling down my cheeks.

I think Mrs. Dayrell was touched, and pleased, too, to see that she was loved. She smiled faintly; her smile was strangely sweet then; but, just as her eyes told me she was going to speak again, another of these fearful agonies seized her, and her shrieks seemed to fill the room.

Except that she grew suddenly pale, I do not think Angélique was moved. My hand trembled so, as I held the glass into which she poured the drops, that I wonder they were not spilled; but Angélique's hand was firm, and so was her voice when she asked me to fetch her another pillow. I believe that she made this an excuse to send me away. I suppose she saw how frightened I was.

When I came back, all was still again, and Angélique was kneeling in prayer beside the bed. I knelt down, too, and the silence went on; only every now and then a long, gasping sigh came from the bed. Presently Angélique rose, and bent over Mrs. Dayrell.

"Shall mademoiselle fetch Monsieur l'Abbé?" she said.

"No, not yet." The voice had a faint, far-off sound, as if it were already dead, and spoke from beyond this world. "I have done so little good, *ma mère*, that I should like to try now. Where is Gertrude? It is getting dark, and I do not see her. I want to speak to her."

I went forward, and drew aside the curtain.

"Ah, sit down and listen. You do not mind Angélique, do you? She is only our nurse, and she knows you and me, too, better than we know ourselves—wait."

The broken voice stopped. Angélique came nearer, and gave her a few drops out of another bottle. Mrs. Dayrell spoke again presently:

"Gertrude, Eugénie says you have quarreled with your husband, and that he gives you up. Child, child, this must be set right. Stop"—I check myself, for I was ready to interrupt her—"I know more than you think I do. I saw your husband; I insisted, and Eugénie brought him to see me. I like him; and I have known Eugène de Vaucresson since he was a child. Do not trust him, Gertrude; you are throwing away substance for shadow, gold for tinsel, a man for a coxcomb. If I could, I would make you promise to undo this folly; but your will is like mine, headstrong. Ah, Gertrude, will you let it wreck you as it has wrecked me?"

"Do not trouble about me," I said, gently. "I have been foolish, and I am trying to be wiser; but my fate is decided for me—I can do nothing."

"You mean that I am not to interfere You were so eager to reunite me and my husband—why may I not take the same interest in you?"

"It is different, I think; but do not trouble about me, dear."

She did not answer. She kept her widely-opened blue eyes fixed on the muslin hangings, as if she were counting the roses thereon. Her eyes had grown larger, I thought, and the sockets seemed deeply sunk below the sharply-cut, blue-veined forehead. She spoke again presently, as if talking to herself.

"I have been in prison a year now"—I started, but she took no notice—"good people would say, in a blessed isolation from the pomps and vanities of a wicked world. Well, perhaps they are right; the world is very like a rainbow; no one ever touched the brightness it shows. Though I have not grown good in this prison-life—I dare say many women would have been saints by this time,

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Gertrude—still, I have learned to think, and what you said just now sounds like nonsense. I do not even think of love as I did. It is not the person we fancy, with our short, purblind sight, will love us best that it is best to marry, but that one who will help us best against ourselves." She stopped, and the old cynical smile crossed her lips. "What a mockery a human being is!" she said, sadly. "I am preaching to you, Gertrude, and giving a crutch at the same time to my own self-will—just as if I should have been any better with a different husband!"

I did not answer, and she seemed to forget her anxiety about me. Gradually the evening came on; the far-off corners of the large room grew dusky; and twice a bat flew across the window, striking it with his wing. Mrs. Dayrell was restless, and her face grew flushed.

I think she suffered, but she did not complain.

All at once she beckoned to me, and I put my ear down to her lips.

"Get your prayer-book presently," she whispered; "there is something there for one like me. I don't know what I say 'Amen' to, when Angélique prays."

She closed her eyes. It seemed as if these few whispered words had exhausted her. I saw now that her strength had not been real when she spoke to me; it seemed as if I had been unfeeling, to give her no sign of what I felt in return for so much exertion of her failing life, and yet I could not bear that she should spend her thoughts on me. I could not talk to her.

Life! How strange and awful it seemed that this living, breathing woman was going away—that her breath would be stopped, like the flame of a candle! Stopped? Yes, here to sight; but would not the life go on?—would there be one instant's pause in that? She would be here one instant—and the next—who could answer that terrible question?

Ever since Mrs. Dayrell had those talks with Mr. Howard at Merdon, I had remarked a Bible and a prayer-book on her dressing-table. I went and got the prayer-book. Angélique guessed my intention; for she went to the large *armoire*, at one end of the room, and opened it. I imagine she feared to listen to the prayers of heretics.

I was very glad she went away. I felt awed and nervous. It seemed sad that there should be only an ignorant girl like me to minister to this dying sufferer; but, as there was no one, I must do the best I could.

Mrs. Dayrell joined in the prayers, but she kept her eyes closed.

I wondered whether she was really dying. I thought it perhaps, after all, might only be like going to sleep. Poor Mr. Dayrell! would he never, never see his wife again? The stillness grew so awful that I did not dare to move. It was a great relief when Madame La Peyre's face appeared at the door.

Angélique moved quietly up to her, and they exchanged a few inaudible words; and then madame went to the door, and beckoned to the abbé.

He went up to the bedside, and spoke. Mrs. Dayrell opened her eyes, and smiled; but she did not speak.

Angélique raised her head, and gave her some nourishment; but she scarcely revived.

They stood several minutes looking at her. Then the abbé knelt down, and Madame La Peyre followed his example. But he did not pray aloud. I wished so much I could change him for Mr. Howard! When, at last, he went away, I followed him to the door.

"Is she dying? Will she never speak again?"

"She may live some hours," he said, sadly, "but I scarcely think she will."

Madame La Peyre lingered. She said to me, timidly: "I must stay; I cannot leave my poor Barbara; but I will not disturb her. I will be so quiet, if I may stay." And she placed herself in a corner farthest from the bed. She could not subdue her agitation, but sat pale and trembling.

Angélique performed her ministrations in silence, and I stood sadly beside the bed, longing to be of some use.

All at once Mrs. Dayrell unclosed her eyes.

"What time is it?" she said "He will come at six."

I felt sure Mr. Dayrell could not come back so soon. I looked at my watch, and told her it was half-past five.

Her lips moved, and I thought she was speaking to me. I bent down to listen.

"He will never come back"—the agony in her voice was terrible—"he is too glad to escape; better far he had never returned; then he would have been able to dream of my repentance; he has seen it, and he knows what a mockery it is."

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Tears began to roll down her face. I looked anxiously at Angélique.

She came and gave a few drops of the stimulant which had so much revived her.

Mrs. Dayrell looked round as if she had been suddenly roused.

"What was that? Is he come yet?" she said, shrinking, as if she knew what our answer would be. "I will not give a message, because I will not go till I have seen him." Then she looked up at me: "Gertrude, I sent him away for a whole year, and now I lie hungering for one moment's sight of him.—Tell me I shall see him, Angélique; for God's sake, tell me he will come in time! if you say 'Yes,' I will wait patiently."

"The dear lady knows that it is as the good God wills." Angélique's voice trembled now, and tears streamed over her face. "Madame is content either way," and she fondly kissed the wasted hand that lay stretched on the coverlet.

Mrs. Dayrell did not answer, but I saw a frightful spasm pass over her face, and her lips closed tightly; the wasted hand clinched as if it would tear something in its vehement grasp—but she did not shriek; a low, shuddering moan told how bravely she was bearing the anguish.

It seemed like a tempest passing over a landscape; but, when she lay still again, Angélique went up close and wiped her forehead.

It was now quite dark. I could no longer see the bowed figure of Madame La Peyre in her far-off corner.

There were only two candles a-light; the silent gloom grew awful.

This silence lasted a long time, and yet I saw by Angélique's face that there was no change in her patient.

I had not thought death could come like this, with such a slow, gradual approach, finding us among our ordinary surroundings, just as we were. Never, never can I forget that awful waiting.

I had thought of death so differently; my mother's was, of course, exceptional, but, when I had thought of my own death, it always seemed to me that I should be prepared, and that all my ideas and wishes would change as it approached; that mere human longings would lose their power.

How awful it was that every thing should go on just as usual, and yet what kind of events might not be happening to that almost undiscernible form on the bed! I remembered my mother's words on board the Adelaide, and every now and then I prayed for this parting soul.

The sharp patter of rain on the window startled me; it was so noisy that it roused Mrs. Dayrell.

"Must I give up?" she said. She was not speaking to us; she seemed to be addressing some one in the alcove on the other side of the bed. "It is harder to give up hope than to bear pain. O Henri, my darling!" —this came in a cry—"I have loved you so, and you will never know it, never!"

Then there came a low moaning, but no more words.

The rain beat more and more fiercely against the window, and the wind began to howl, and to strain the tree-branches. The clock had been stopped: but one far off, in the stable-yard, kept on reminding us of its presence, and I could hear Mrs. Dayrell's watch ticking from the little pocket above her head.

Tick, tick, tick—how loud the sound grew! It seemed to have become iron-tongued, and to be striking my head as it vibrated, and then it struck my arm; and there was Angélique bidding me hold a light, and, before I was quite awake, the room was filled with a shriek. Ah, I can never forget that cry. Madame La Peyre was beside the bed; I rose from my knees, and was bending forward with the light Angélique had placed in my hand; but Angélique waved me back; she would not let me see the agony that had evoked that cry. I stood shivering and trembling—it seemed to me a long time—and then Angélique knelt down again, and prayed aloud. She rose up quickly, and I saw tears streaming from her eyes.

"Will mademoiselle go away now," she whispered, "and take madame with her? No one is of any use now but me."

Then I knew that the agony was ended, and that death was with us in the room.

CHAPTER XLVII.

THE ABBÉ'S STORY.

How strangely grief acts! It is like a touchstone: there are natures which shrink

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at its approach, and seem to lose all faculties; while others not only strive to bear it bravely, but bear also a share of the burden it lays on weaker natures. Till now I had not loved the abbé. His manner charmed me, and I always felt subdued by his gentle influence, but I learned both to love and reverence him in the sad days that followed Mrs. Dayrell's death. Madame La Peyre did not give way to violent grief. She was very silent, and her red and swollen eyelids told how much she suffered; but she had only strength to be passively resigned, while the abbé arranged and saw to the execution of every thing, and was, besides, always on the watch to comfort his sorrowing sister and Angélique—for Angélique's grief was, I felt, deeper than that even of Madame La Peyre—there seemed to be much touching sympathy in the abbé's manner toward the patient, uncomplaining woman.

I think they had both labored for Mrs. Dayrell's conversion, and had longed to see her what they would have called a true penitent before she died.

I knew we were all counting the hours with sickening anxiety. The abbé had sent a messenger to meet Mr. Dayrell, but we had no assurance that he would be found.

"Mademoiselle," Angélique said, "it is of Monsieur Dayrell that we must all think now; his grief will be terrible."

He arrived in the afternoon of the second day. I met him on the staircase, and, except that he passed with only a bow, I should not have guessed that any thing unusual had happened to him; but there was never full daylight on the staircase, and I shrank from looking closely at him.

He locked himself in his wife's room, and staid there so long that at last the abbé went to summon him.

I had gone to Madame La Peyre, and we both sat and cried together as we tried to realize his feelings.

It seemed to me that they must be so terrible! How bitterly he must have mourned the estrangement of this last year, even if he had not been much to blame! Oh, how he must long at this dreadful time to unsay every unkind word, to obliterate every cold look and action, which had galled the proud heart that now lay so still!

I broke down so utterly in my efforts to comfort Madame La Peyre, and gave way to such a burst of sobs, that she dried her eyes and looked up suddenly

"What is it, my child, my Gertrude?"

And then I told her what I felt Mr. Dayrell must be feeling.

I was surprised when she shook her head.

"Those thoughts will come to him, doubtless," she said; "they must always come to the best of us even—for which of us, Gertrude, has loved his neighbors as *le bon Dieu* means us to love one another? But, remember, all these faults are not only against the person we mourn; and, unless I am mistaken in Henri, he learned to sorrow truly for his errors before he returned to my poor Barbara."

We did not see Mr. Dayrell that evening; the abbé was with him constantly.

Next day was the funeral, and, as I found Madame La Peyre would not be present at it, I staid with her. It was a bright, sparkling morning, and I thought how often Mrs. Dayrell had wished to be out in the sunshine when it came shining into her room at Merdon.

It streamed brilliantly on the little procession moving sadly and slowly to the gate. Old Matthieu had asked leave to follow it, and he and Angélique walked side by side some little distance behind Mr. Dayrell.

"He is to leave us this afternoon," Madame La Peyre said; "he is gentle, much calmer than we could have hoped, but he says at present he can only endure life alone. After a while he will come back to us."

After hearing this, I was surprised when Angélique brought me a message.

"Mr. Dayrell is in the *salon*, mademoiselle, and he would like to say good-by to you before he goes."

"O Angélique," I said, in alarm, "what can I do? I do not know what I ought to say to him."

She gave me one of her cheering smiles:

"Never trouble yourself about what to say, mademoiselle; perhaps mademoiselle will only have to listen."

What a wonderful power Angélique has over me! In a moment I feel quiet and composed; I forget to think about my own nervousness; Mr. Dayrell and his sorrow fill my heart.

He was standing near one of the screens, which looked more faded than ever against the intense black he wore.

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He was very pale and thin, but he looked calm, and, as he came forward and took my hand, he smiled.

"I must say 'Good-by' to you," he said. "I want to thank you for your kindness—I should say your love—for—for—she said she could never tell me how you had helped and cheered her life at Merdon—more than you knew."

"No one could help loving her."

I felt I did not deserve this. I could hardly speak, for I thought how often I had resented her manner, but his deep calm helped me. I recognized his English nature in it. A sudden impulse seized me. Why should I not tell him the words which only I had heard?

"Do you know what her constant thought was," I said, "even to the last?"

He looked at me eagerly, and I repeated the sad words—trembling, after I began, lest they should overcome him.

Hot tears dropped on my hand as he still held it.

"May God bless you!" he said. "I could never thank you enough for this comfort."

Then he wrung my hand hard, and went hurriedly to join the abbé, who was to take him as far as Yvetôt.

A strange feeling of relief had come into the house the next morning, and yet not of relief from sorrow. It was difficult to believe that one need not still move silently about in the house, and, above all, it was difficult to believe that I could keep Angélique as long as I liked to talk to her, for of late her time had been wholly occupied with Mrs. Dayrell.

"We must take care of Angélique," Madame La Peyre said to me; "she loved my poor Barbara so much!"

And, indeed, from the day of the funeral she looked paler and thinner. She even began to stoop a little; before, she had been erect—even to stiffness.

She was setting my *armoire* to rights, and I was much struck with her paleness.

"Angélique," I said, "you must rest more than you do; you have gone through far more in all this sorrow than any one else has; you do many things for me which I could do for myself. Come"—I bent down over her as she stooped to a drawer—"come"—her cheeks felt thin and soft as I kissed them—"I am going to manage you and take care of you now—it is plain that you will not take care of yourself."

She stooped still lower, and I saw that she was wiping her eyes covertly, but she turned round on me with a smiling face.

"Pardon, mademoiselle, but, if mademoiselle is so kind as to wish to help me, she will let me do as much for her as I can; it helps me. But mademoiselle is not well herself; she looks very pale and changed. I am only an old nurse, mademoiselle knows, but a nurse must always have her baby."

She nodded, and went away with a collection she had been making among my clothes, and I saw that tears were running down her worn face.

"Only an old nurse!" That had been Mrs. Dayrell's favorite name for Angélique.

I thought that, when she seemed a little stronger, I would get Angélique to take me about among the cottages. It seemed as if change must be good for her after her long nursing. I did not know that I was going to lay a fresh burden on her, and yet I felt strangely weak and exhausted.

At dinner-time, a few days after Mr. Dayrell went away, the abbé said he wanted me to come to his study when I could spare him an hour.

"I will come now," I said.

He had been so very kind, tender even, in his manner to every one since that sad Monday night; and now a touch of his formal courtesy chilled me as he made a low bow and held the study-door open for me to pass in.

"Will madame be seated?" he said, in his conventional manner.

"O Monsieur l'Abbé," I said, "please call me Gertrude, or I shall think you are angry with me."

He turned his head aside, and I think his voice shook a little.

"No, I am not angry, my dear child—not angry with you, at any rate; you have to suffer for the faults of others."

He pointed to a chair opposite the one in which he always sat.

I felt interested, and nervous too, as I sat down to listen; for I now understood that he had something special to tell me.

The abbé looked earnestly at me—so long and so earnestly that I grew red under his scrutiny. He saw this, and he sighed as he looked away.

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"I had fully meant," he said, "to have spoken to you on that day I met you in the garden; but so much has come between that I have postponed doing this; and yet, my child, it must be said—it is a duty I owe both to you and to Captain Brand."

I had thought more than once of that strange, painful scene in the little garden, and had resolved not to judge Eugène till I had spoken with the abbé; but it all seemed dim, far off, now. It was hardly possible to believe that this change in my feelings had come little more than a week ago.

When the abbé spoke of Captain Brand, I looked up eagerly. A conviction came to me that only through the abbé should I ever get tidings of my guardian.

"I must begin at the beginning," he said, "and therefore I must go back to last year. Forgive me if I pain you."

He looked straight across the room fixedly, and I loved the abbé at that moment. I grew hot and cold with shame; I could not bear to think of last year now. I bent my head. He did not look at me, but went on:

"Captain Brand told me he did not like you to be with Eugène de Vaucresson, and that, therefore, he could not consider my sister a suitable guardian for you, as my pupil would probably visit here after her return from Devonshire. I told him that under Madame La Peyre's guardianship you would see little of Monsieur de Vaucresson, as she would always be with you. Then he told me very simply, but with much earnest feeling, all that happened on board the Adelaide."

Here the abbé paused. I glanced up, and he looked so very sad and serious that I was frightened.

"I must tell you that I was very much troubled. Catholics, as you know, consider marriage a sacrament; and it seemed to me that you were heedless, indeed much in the wrong, and greatly in need of careful guidance. At first I told Captain Brand that I could not send you to my sister; and that he would do well to place you with his own mother. I must tell you his answer: 'You misjudge Miss Stewart,' he said; 'she is very young, and very innocent of any knowledge of evil; I trust her entirely, but I do not trust your pupil. I will place her with Madame La Peyre; but I wish Monsieur de Vaucresson to know the truth as soon as we have left Château-Fontaine. It may check idle dreams.' I should have kept silence on this point, but your husband's wish was too strong to be set aside, and, as soon as you had departed, I told Eugène."

"Then he knew it before he first wrote to me?" I said, angrily.

The abbé looked at me. He was evidently puzzled.

"But, my child, you knew it too," he said.

"Ah, yes, yes!" And I hid my burning face. All the vague, misty doubt I had tried to wrap round my marriage was torn away to the last shred, and I saw—oh, how plainly!—my wrong-doing. I actually resented in Eugène the conduct I had justified in myself. I believe just then I thought myself worthy of any punishment.

The abbé went on:

"Before Captain Brand told me about his marriage, he had engaged me to promise secrecy; and I was much troubled when he insisted that this secrecy must extend for the present to Madame La Peyre. Before we parted, he promised to be guided by circumstances; but his idea was to leave you wholly free and unfettered; he said already your liberty had been trespassed on in the marriage. Well," he sighed, "all that has been done, and is past. We are coming to a part of your life which is not past, and which you have yet to decide."

I looked up, trembling. I forgot what he had said about the sanctity of marriage, and I thought he wanted me to marry Eugène.

"Monsieur," I said, "whether Captain Brand is able to set me free or not, I can never love Monsieur de Vaucresson. I can never see him again."

"Really?" He looked suddenly softened. "Then, my dear child, I have little more to say; and, if I had known this sooner, I should have begun my explanation in a different way. I will hurry on now. The last time Captain Brand was here, you and he both agreed, I understand, to a separation. In your country such things are, I am told, possible, but with us they are unusual. Marriage is so very holy—a sacrament, as I have said—that we consider even a thought against its power to be mortal sin."

I shuddered. It seemed as if a curse had been spoken, and that my veins filled suddenly with ice.

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"After Monsieur le Capitaine left you, he came to me. He did not speak of his own feelings; but he said he could never be your husband, and that you had no wish to be his wife. He asked me some questions about my pupil; and he said that as soon as the legal arrangements were made, if they could be made, it seemed to him desirable that you and Monsieur de Vaucresson should be allowed to meet."

"He said that?"

"Yes; and then he smiled, and said to me: 'You see, Monsieur l'Abbé, I have not outgrown romance even yet, and I think, when there is love on both sides, a marriage is pretty sure to be happy.'"

I was not able to help crying, and my sobs checked the abbé. Oh, how black my own wicked, self-willed folly grew in the light of Captain Brand's generosity!

After a little pause, the abbé went on; but he spoke slowly, as if he feared to pain me:

"Then, my dear child, I was compelled to tell Captain Brand the truth—that I knew that, even if you were free, my pupil would not marry you." He hurried on, but the words had lost their power to wound—I was too wretched to feel resentment: "And I told him, too, that, as a priest, I could not sanction my pupil's marriage with a Protestant who was still, in my opinion, bound by the first marriage."

"What answer did he make?" I said, eagerly.

"He said, 'Then you condemn Miss Stewart to a single life, for she will never be my wife.' But, my dear child, this explanation is unnecessary; I wish to explain that which has happened so lately. I was, as you may think, very much grieved and displeased when I learned that Monsieur de Vaucresson had dared to write to you after all he knew, after all he had said to me; and I resolved, if I saw need, to inform you of his real sentiments. Meantime, I wrote to him a severe letter, in which I forbade him to hold any communication with Château-Fontaine, and rebuked his conduct with regard to you. To my surprise, he told me that he had received a letter from Captain Brand, in which that gentleman calmly asked his intentions with regard to you, supposing the marriage was set aside. By the same post came a few stern words from Captain Brand. He said that De Vaucresson must never see you again, and that, if his sailing-orders had not arrived some days before he expected, he should have returned to Normandy, and taken you to his mother in England. You may, therefore, judge how great was our anxiety and distress when my pupil so suddenly presented himself at Château-Fontaine. I must tell you that your courage and simplicity saved me much trouble; but, until to-day, I was not quite sure that I understood your feelings. Now that I do understand you, I must ask you to give me a proof that you are in earnest."

"A proof! What can I do?" My forehead was full of pain, and my temples seemed to be swelling with the pulses that beat in them. I could hardly understand the abbé's words.

He looked at me, and then he rose, and poured me out a glass of water; but I felt powerless to take it from his hand.

"Tell me, please," I said.

"Well"—he smiled, and spoke more easily—"there, there, my child, you have excited yourself too much. It is only that I think the best way to end this painful matter is for you to write a few words—I will dictate them—to Monsieur de Vaucresson."

"I cannot, monsieur; I ought not. I do not wish to have any thing to do with him. You do not know all he said."

"Yes, yes; I know, perhaps, more than you do; and I have grave reasons for urging this really trifling matter, so far as it regards you."

All that followed is misty and disjointed in my memory, as if it had been dreamed instead of acted. I know the abbé placed me at his desk, and I wrote down words as he spoke them. I believe I told Eugène that I did not love him, and that I refused ever to see him again. I could hardly sign my name. Then I took the glass of water from the table; I heard a crash as it fell; and then came darkness.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

TOO LATE.

When last I looked out of the window, the trees had that exquisite powdery-green tint which fades away with spring; but to-

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day, as, for the first time, Angélique wheels the chair in which she sometimes places me to the window, I see that even the full glory of summer has gone by; there is a sombre tint on the elms and poplars, and a group of maple-trees near the house is already touched with crimson streaks. It does not seem long ago since Angélique brought me dinner, and yet it is growing dusk already.

Till to-day I have scarcely felt awake enough to ask questions; and even now I like better to smile at my kind nurse and look out of window than to talk. Presently Madame La Peyre comes in; she kisses me fondly, and speaks as softly as if I were a baby.

"It is charming to see thee so much better, my little one;" and she draws my shawl tenderly round me, and kisses me again.

I suppose I am very weak, for as I smile at madame I find tears rolling down my face.

Angélique shakes her head.

"Mademoiselle is not good," she says; "she will spoil all the frills of her *peignoir*, and I goffered them myself."

This little scolding makes me laugh.

"I begin to think nursing agrees with you, Angélique; you look twice as well as you did the other day."

Madame and Angélique look at one another.

"Thou must not talk much, my Gertrude. It is probably two months, perhaps longer, since thou hast been well enough to study the looks of Angélique."

"Ah, then I have been very ill?"

"Yes;" and then a sparkle comes into the sweet old dark eyes, and Madame La Peyre looks as bright as she used to look at Merdon; "but, my Gertrude, if I talk about thy illness, Angélique will certainly scold; she says invalids must be amused."

"How is Monsieur l'Abbé, and why does he not come to see me?"

"He did come at first, dear little one, but then he was in vacation; he has a post in Paris, which just now demands his constant presence."

They need not have feared I should talk too much; even these few words had exhausted me, and I was content to lean back and listen to madame's pretty chat about all sorts of things; it was so pretty, and so glibly told, that I thought she must have made it up for my benefit. It was almost incredible that so much that was amusing could take place in the quiet little village beside the Seine.

After this, time slipped away, and, though the hours seemed to pass slowly, yet, looking back along a week, the days had gone rapidly. I made progress fitfully; sometimes I astonished Angélique, and then I went back for a day or two into utter weakness. I can never tell how good and patient my dear nurse was; for, though I tried to remember her devotion, and to give her as little trouble as I could, still I know I was often impatient and restless.

"I shall soon be off your hands," I said, one evening, "and then what will you do?"

She smiled

"Then I shall have to take mademoiselle down to Fontaine, to see some of the good people who have been so anxious for her health."

"Have they been anxious? Dear, kind people! Why, they did not know me."

"Ah, but yes — our people have seen mademoiselle in church and at market, and they love her already; and one Saturday, when I left mademoiselle in the care of madame, I went to Caudebec, and Marie Touchet and Madame Vagnon, and even la Veuve Chéron, were full of inquiries for mademoiselle."

"How soon shall I be strong enough to go and see Marie Touchet, you dear old thing?"

"But mademoiselle is strong enough to take a drive now; some day soon she shall go and see Marie."

"Yes, but I must go with you, please. Marie will not talk to madame or to me as she talks to you, Angélique. Oh, I must go soon; I want to see that pretty Fifine."

"Then mademoiselle will have to go to Caudebec. Fifine has been Madame Léon-Leroux this last fortnight!"

"Already?"

"But it was two months since the day of betrothal," says Angélique, impressively; "and two months is rather long for an engagement."

"Is it?"

This talk set me thinking, and for the first time since my illness I was able to think connectedly. Before this, whenever I tried to go back to that talk with the abbé, I found myself wandering off into quite trivial mat-

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ters—as to how I should have a new gown made, or when my hair would grow long again, or something equally irrelevant. I learned much later that I had had brain-fever, and I suppose this accounted for the listless, torpid way in which I had been content to live since I began to recover; for, though almost every day I walked up and down the avenue, leaning on Angélique's arm, I felt no wish to pass beyond the gates, or even to cross the bridge behind the château.

To-day I had taken a longer walk than usual, and fell asleep on the sofa when I came in; and now, after this talk with Angélique, my brains seem to have shaken into place again, and I go on thinking.

Thinking over all that happened since I left Tasmania—so long ago in feeling, so short a while in actual time—I broke down, crying bitterly. It seemed to me that till now I had never really felt my mother's loss—never mourned her enough. If I had loved her truly, should I not have trusted her? And yet the whole purpose of my life since she left me had been to harden myself in disobedience to what, at the time, I considered her last wish. Then, as thought went on growing clearer and more piercing in the conviction it brought, I saw how this principle of rebellion had been the bitter root of my after wrong-doing. Even if I had been treated unfairly, still it had all been done in love and by mother. The abbé's words came back with a power which made me lie back on the couch exhausted, for I so deeply repented disobedience toward my mother—what sorrow could be sufficient for my rebellion against a manifest ordinance of God? I saw now for the first time where I had gone astray; I had been right in my belief that marriage without love was a sin, but I had willfully determined that, because I could not love Captain Brand, that ceremony on board the Adelaide was a mockery. I had acted on this belief as if I had been free. I cast away the excuse which my youth and my ignorance might have given. I was a child, but I was not a fool. Deeply as it burned itself into my heart, I saw the truth now. I had willfully shut my eyes to the sanctity of marriage, and but for God's mercy I might be more hopelessly wretched than I was.

As I lay there, not agitated as I used to be, but calmly considering the past, I asked myself suddenly if it was yet too late to make the only atonement in my power, and tell Captain Brand I was willing to do my duty, and to ask him to receive me as his wife.

It was not a pleasant thought. I still believed that, unless a wife loved her husband, she must be a wretched woman; and I felt that I could never love Captain Brand; but with this shrinking came the remembrance of Mrs. Dayrell's warning—"he would help me to be better"—and at least it would be doing something against my will.

For a time I felt soothed; this idea of self-sacrifice pleased my self-love. I was going to do at last something to match Captain Brand's own generosity.

Next morning when I woke I was not quite so content, and Angélique saw my trouble while she dressed me.

"If mademoiselle wills," she said, "we will go and see Madame Roussel at the mill. She has asked every day for news of mademoiselle, and from the window in the mill one can see on the left the church of Le Tait, and on the right nearly as far as Guillebœuf."

"I would rather go and see Marie Touchet." I felt cross and contradictory.

"*Allons*"—Angélique smiled—"mademoiselle is getting well so fast that she will soon be able to go so far, but for to-day the carriage is not ready, and Baptiste, our coachman, is ill; and the mill is close by. Mademoiselle must progress by little steps, as the bebbies."

"Very well, but, Angélique, it is you who are getting self-willed."

"Ah," she says, brightly, "that is right; it is always a happy day for the nurse when her patient is not quite content. *Allons*, in a week we shall see mademoiselle running down-stairs again."

She went away and left me with my breakfast. It may be convalescence that makes me feel so cross and troubled, but there is another cause for the gloom that possesses me this morning.

I quite overlooked yesterday that Captain Brand told both the abbé and me that he should never consider me as his wife. Is this because I have so greatly offended him, or is it personal dislike? In one case I might hope to soften him by my repentance, but the other is quite different, and this

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doubt makes my plan impossible. If I could only see him I think I could tell; and then the intense shame that comes at the thought of seeing him, now that I know how much he has to forgive, makes me conscious that my idea of yesterday had no reality in it; I could never say one word.

By the time Angélique comes back I have grown so troubled, and perplexed, and morbid, with all this self-communing, that I refuse to go to the mill.

"Angélique, I am fit for nothing but to lie on the sofa and knit!"

Angélique yields, but I can see she thinks I give way; perhaps I do, but my head aches so badly that I cannot even knit

CHAPTER XLIX.

MY BIRTHDAY.

It is spring again—a bright spring morning—almost a year since I last wrote down what was happening.

I suppose I began to think too soon, or I worried myself, but I fell ill again, and it was long before I recovered my strength. I continued for months in a low, nervous state. The abbé arrived just before November, and spent a few weeks at the château, and he seemed dismayed at the change in me.

"You want me, Gertrude," he said—ah, how kind and fatherly he was, and how I rejoiced to have him with us again!—"your brain has been rusting; I shall set you far more difficult tasks than you used to do."

I laughed, but I felt that he was right. I had spent my time in constant self-reproach and regret for the *past*, and when I was with Madame La Peyre our talk seldom went beyond embroidery, or the sickness and needs of our villagers. I always grew cheerful with Angélique, but she had been away for a week lately, in retreat with the religious community, of which she was a member. The château was quite changed without her, and, when she and the abbé arrived the same evening, it seemed like a festival.

So I worked hard with the abbé, first at German, and then I persuaded him to teach me Latin; he refused at first, asserting that learning was very unnecessary to a woman. I believe I conquered him by saying I was anxious to follow the service in church in the original, for I am sure both he and Angélique longed earnestly for my conversion, although they refrained from actual persuasion. Little by little my days were filled with occupation, and I rarely found time for sad thoughts.

Every now and then a letter from my father or one of my sisters stirred my heart with ardent longing for home, but there was no hint of any wish to see me; the inquiry was always the same, "When would my husband return, and when did he wish me to be addressed as Mrs. Brand?"

In his last letter, my father spoke very strongly on this point, and said he thought it had been a grave error from the beginning, that I had not taken my husband's name; I think my father is right.

But I am helpless in the matter, because it was Captain Brand's arrangement that I should be called Miss Stewart, and we do not know where he is.

All that the abbé can tell me is that his ship was bound for Hudson's Bay, and that he expected to be away a year, and promised to write to the abbé directly he returned.

This bright spring morning is my birthday, but I do not feel very happy, although Madame La Peyre and Angélique are making a festival of it.

I found a bouquet beside my bed when I woke this morning, and at breakfast the abbé gave me a charming edition of "Paul et Virginie," and dear Madame La Peyre fastened round my neck the quaintest necklace, which had, she said, once belonged to a queen of France.

"The Duponts are coming to keep our child's birthday," she said to the abbé, "so you must help me to talk to madame, for Monsieur Dupont will only have ears for Gertrude; he told me when I went to St.-Antoine that he did not think any English young lady could be so charming; he fancied they were all rude and awkward."

"He is very absurd. Suppose I were to think that all Frenchmen were like Monsieur Dupont? Ah, but I could not do that, could I, *mon père*, after living at Château-Fontaine?"

The Père Alphonse smiled, and asked me if I wanted a holiday.

"Do you?" I said. "I enjoy your lessons too much to wish to lose one, and I am not a child now, monsieur; I am nineteen."

"Thou wilt always be a child, my Gertrude"—there were tears in madame's eyes—

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"and it is a blessing to be thankful for; I hope never to be quite a full-grown woman," she said, saucily.

"This is edifying advice from a guardian to her charge"—the abbé laughed—"it is evident, my sister, that thou art not suited to the post of a duenna.—Come, Gertrude, shall we take a walk before we go to the study?"

I did not often get a walk with the abbé, for he seldom went out in the morning, and I was still too delicate to face the evening air. I had grown taller and very thin, and I could see that I was considered an anxious charge.

"Monsieur"—I usually called the abbé *mon père* when I called him any thing, but I felt timid now—"you said that—that Captain Brand would write as soon as he returned; he has been gone more than a year. Is it not strange that he does not write?"

The abbé flushed a little.

"Has the year expired?—your memory is better than mine. I can, however, write to the English lawyer who manages Captain Brand's money-matters, and ask if either he or his ship has been heard of. You are, then, anxious for news of Captain Brand?" he said, inquisitively.

"I think we must always be anxious about friends at sea," I said, coldly; I do not want to tell any one the resolution I have made. Until I see Captain Brand, I cannot know whether my sacrifice would be acceptable to him, and there would be a sort of mock heroism in asserting my willingness to do what may never be required of me. I am not overwrought and morbid now; I never felt so real before, and therefore I shrink from forecasting events, and try to live in the present, but something warns me that, although a sense of accomplished duty may in the far-off future give me content, still I can never live the free, happy life with Captain Brand that I live at Château-Fontaine. I suppose love—I mean the love I read about in books—is not in my nature, for, if I had really loved Eugène, I could not have been cured so quickly. My idea of real love is that it cannot die or change its object: no matter what a man is, a woman will love him through all; she may refuse to marry him, but she will never be untrue to her love. The abbé said once that there is an earthly imitation of all that is in heaven; it seems to me that real love, such as I imagine it, is as simple and as devoted as the love that a holy person like Angélique has for God, only really happy in the presence of its object.

Perhaps the surest proof that I never really loved Eugène, is that my idea of love itself was intensified; if two people really love, it seems to me they will not care for talk or amusement, they will be simply happy in the consciousness of each other's presence; a look, a gesture even, will give all the assurance needed that each is blessed with the love of the other; and, when I looked forward to seeing Eugène, I thought of charming amusement, and the delight of being told the sweet, flattering things he said about my eyes; and, besides, I clung to the remembrance of his fascinating influence; I felt that strangely even in our last meeting—ah! yes—as I think of it, that meeting comes back so vividly that I bend over my book and shrink from my own thoughts.

I hope I shall never see Eugène again. I do not love him, or I could not think so badly of him, but I dread myself when I think of his influence—and yet, if I were Captain Brand's wife, I should feel safe.

I fear that, though I am changed in some ways, I am still more easily influenced for evil than for good; and that, though I shrink from Eugène, still only duty and principle make me shrink. I can never love him; yet, if he were but good, I should think him very charming. Now, when I think of Captain Brand, although duty, principle, every feeling that belongs to the word "ought," tell me to love him, I cannot; I feel only a timid reverence, and gratitude for the forbearance he has shown toward me, and a great safety in the thought of his protection.

"You are silent, my child." I gave such a sudden start that the abbé looked at me attentively. "You are not unhappy, Gertrude?"

"Oh, no, *mon père*. How could I be unhappy when you are all so good? But"—I screwed up my courage, and looked at him earnestly—"I wish you would be so very kind as to write to this agent without delay—Captain Brand will not—I mean he said he would never come back to Château-Fontaine unless I asked him to come. I feel—that is, I mean—do you not think I ought to ask him to come?—he is still my guardian."

The abbé bowed, in his grave, courteous way, but he did not look at me; and I felt chilled and silenced. I knew he was dis-

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pleased with me, and yet I could not open my heart. Perhaps, if he had questioned me, I could have told him just then both my resolution and my doubts, but I am not sure. It may be because as a child I lived so much to myself, but it is always very difficult to me to speak of inner feelings.

"There can be no doubt of that, my dear child," the abbé said. "I will write to-day, and, if the answer brings us the news of Captain Brand's return, then you shall write to him, and we shall have the pleasure of seeing him at Château-Fontaine."

"Thank you very much. Can your letter go to-day?"

The abbé smiled. Ah, how age must chill the blood! He did not seem to feel a spark of my eagerness.

"If I am to send my letter off to-day, Mademoiselle Gertrude must go without her reading; for we may expect Monsieur and Madame Dupont at any moment."

"Monsieur"—I suppose contradiction at the abbé's calm made me teasing—"don't you think Monsieur Dupont is very ridiculous?"

"You mean he makes you laugh?"

"Not quite that. You make me laugh; and so does Madame La Peyre. But I laugh *at* Monsieur Dupont."

"Yes." The abbé smiled so genially that I thought he agreed with me, and I felt some surprise, for I had said this on purpose to tease him. But he added: "And, possibly, he laughs at us, too."

The abbé was laughing now at me.

"Well, he may laugh at me, and very likely he does; but he cannot laugh at you, or at Madame La Peyre."

The abbé seems quite amused at this.

"My dear child, Monsieur Dupont does not see us as we see ourselves, or as you in your lovingness see us."

"Ah, but it is impossible we can be so ridiculous as he is."

"I cannot agree with you. In one way or another, we are each one of us ridiculous to others. You have been reared among quiet, self-controlled people; and you must remember, Gertrude, that the English are considered by other nations cold and undemonstrative. There is much less self-repression among us. But I am not sure that our friend at St.-Antoine is really vainer than the Englishman who sits in silence because he is too proud to make mistakes. Monsieur Dupont is at least more useful—he makes *les frais* of the conversation."

"Well, I will try not to think him ridiculous; but I am not convinced."

Very soon after I left the study I heard the grate of carriage-wheels, and went down into the hall with Madame La Peyre to receive the visitors.

Madame Dupont was almost unchanged. I believe she still wore last year's bonnet; her broad face looked as wooden as and browner than ever. She sailed up the steps, her husband following with a large bouquet of narcissus and tulips bordered by exquisite pansies.

I thought his greetings to Madame La Peyre would never be ended; but he did not offer her the bouquet. When he had ended his compliments, he wheeled suddenly round on his heels, and made me so low a bow that I could hardly help laughing.

"Mademoiselle, I have the honor to congratulate you on your birthday, and to offer you these flowers. They are simple garden-flowers; a poor offering, but in their spring freshness they are in harmony with the youth and beauty of mademoiselle."

Another bow, and then he stood straight and erect, to see the effect of his speech. I saw him glance at his wife, and she gave a semi-smile of approval — perhaps she had concocted the little speech, and he had said it off from memory.

"Thank you very much, monsieur, for your good wishes; I think the flowers are lovely." But I am sure Monsieur Dupont expected a longer, prettier sentence; for he stood waiting, with his mouth half open. The abbé is right; it is, on the whole, simpler and pleasanter to others to be able to express one's feelings easily.

I had not seen Monsieur Dupont and the abbé together; and, when he came in, it seemed to me that he was just as effusive as his visitor was. The two gentlemen bowed, and shook hands, and then bowed again, and exchanged inquiries, keeping each other standing about four times as long as the greeting between two Englishmen would have taken. When all was over, Monsieur Dupont turned to me.

"I trust mademoiselle has quite recovered her health, and that we may hope soon to have the pleasure of receiving her at St.-Antoine. Ah, it is there mademoiselle will

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see a farm-yard—pigs, cows, chickens; if mademoiselle will believe me, never did she see such turkeys as the turkeys of Madame Dupont. Mademoiselle likes turkey?"—I nodded, for he gave me no chance of getting in a word—"it is, I believe, a dish that is eaten in England at Christmas, with onions. Ah, but it is sad that such a beautiful fowl should be spoiled by bad cooking. Mademoiselle, until you have eaten a larded turkey *aux truffes*, you must not consider you know the taste of the beast."

Then he turned swiftly to Madame La Peyre, who was being instructed in the art of propagating heart's-ease so as to keep the flowers large. I thought Madame Dupont was dissatisfied with her pupil; her eyes looked very hard and bead-like, and she was extra stiff and angular as she sat bolt-upright staring at the gentle old lady, who received her instructions with smiling grace. But Monsieur Dupont broke in upon the conference.

"Madame," he said, rubbing his hands and smiling, "I rejoice to see mademoiselle so much better; but permit me to remark that mademoiselle is pale and thin, also. Now observe, I beseech you, the colors on the cheeks of Madame Dupont." He turned and pointed toward her, as a showman in a traveling menagerie points out a wild beast. "Those colors, madame, are the result of *les bains*—nothing else, I assure you; and, if mademoiselle, as soon as the season comes round again, goes away with you, madame, to Les Petites Dalles—*ah, ma foi*, but it is a place to know about, Les Petites Dalles—and if mademoiselle takes forty-eight—what do I say?—even thirty-six sea-baths—she will return to Château-Fontaine with a bloom of childhood—*tenez*, with a bloom like that on the cheeks of Madame Dupont."

He made a little pause, cleared his throat, and looked at us in smiling triumph.

Madame Dupont was not at all abashed as she smiled; her red cheeks seemed to dilate with satisfaction. I thought if any thing so like a wooden doll was to be the result, I would rather leave Les Petites Dalles unvisited.

"Forty-eight baths is a large number;" and I thought Madame La Peyre looked mischievously at her visitor.

He spun round on his heels at once, and his words came in a splutter of haste.

"But no, madame, on the contrary, Madame Dupont has before now taken sixty, as madame knows it is so much better to take them by dozens; but it is a question of scientific management and much serious forethought. Ah, but yes"—his voice went up to a shrill falsetto in his excitement—"sea-bathing is a science, and it is the persons foolish as geese who come and bathe without due regard and forethought who make it to be supposed that there is a risk in bathing. Look at me, madame"—he patted his plump sides and the front of his white waistcoat, and then went on shoveling out his words as if they were coals flung on the fire—"I am well—I am strong. Aha! my strength would astonish you—and to what is it to be attributed? Madame, it is the sea-baths of last autumn, taken with precaution, to which I attribute it. At Les Petites Dalles I rise according to the tide: if it serves at seven o'clock, *bon;* I rise early, and am in the water at seven. I take three plunges; no more"—he held out his broad, flat hand, like the paddle of a duck, and almost as yellow—"three plunges; and then I return to my hotel, where I find my warm foot-bath and my warm towels; then I take a *bouillon*, then a walk of about half an hour; then, after, I breakfast. If the tide mounts later, I rise late, and take breakfast so soon as my bath is completed; but never—no, not to my dearest friend—do I give a moment of conversation between my bath and my breakfast; I should infallibly injure my digestion."

I ventured to remark that I should not like the plan of rising so as to suit the tide.

"Ah, but pardon"—his eyes got so round with eagerness that he looked more than ever like a frog—"that is just the important point. By early rising on a day of late tide, mademoiselle runs the risk of fatigue, conversation, and the numerous little accidents which exhaust the nerves and wear away the finer tissues of life before she takes her bath. No, mademoiselle, unless the sea-bath is treated with the respect due to so great a science, it becomes dangerous and unhealthy."

I looked at the abbé—even he must surely regard this fuss about bathing as absurd; but no, he was listening with earnest attention, and even made inquiries about Les Petites Dalles, and the best means of reaching it.

"There is one advice"—Monsieur Dupont spread the fingers of both hands to give em-

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phasis to his words—"monsieur must be careful not to allow these ladies to linger on the sea-coast when once the weather becomes cold. On that northern coast the wind is"—here Monsieur Dupont's grimace expressed any amount of discomfort—"it is fierce, it is brutal in its violence; and the cold"—he shivered—"my teeth chatter in only thinking of it."

"Monsieur Dupont suffers very much from cold weather;" his wife says this with a strong dash of pity.

"Monsieur must, then, have suffered this winter," says Madame La Peyre; "it has been so very cold!"

"I have been told," says Monsieur Dupont—it is extraordinary how he can so monopolize conversation—"that in the north this winter sailors have been frozen on the rigging."

I look anxiously at the abbé, and I see that he is not smiling. I have read in books of ships blocked up in the ice till all on board have perished. I feel sick and giddy.

"*Ah, mon Dieu!* Mademoiselle, then, finds herself ill;" that dreadful Monsieur Dupont has put the window open, and is fanning me with his brown-holland hat.—"Sophie, my angel, come to the succor of mademoiselle; hold, then, thy *flacon* to her nose."

I manage to laugh—to say I am all right, and Madame La Peyre perceives my annoyance, and asks my tormentors to come and look at her pigs.

I am rid of Monsieur Dupont for the present, but I cannot shake off the fear he has created. I can only see Captain Brand frozen to death in the midst of icebergs.

Monsieur Dupont's sentence clouded the remainder of my birthday, though I tried to enter into the brightness of the little *fête*. Madame wore a new cap in honor of the event, and there were gray instead of black ribbons in it; and Angélique arranged a most picturesque dessert—various dishes of delicious cakes and sweetmeats, and a pyramid of apples decked with spring flowers and sprigs of crimson beech.

After dinner, Monsieur Dupont bowed to me and said, "To the health of mademoiselle, in the English fashion," and then clinked his glass against the abbé's, and drank to me with another bow. They made such a business of it, that I thought the glasses would be broken; but Monsieur Dupont looked very serious, and evidently thought he was doing the right thing, although he explained to me that this fashion in France was chiefly seen among *commis voyageurs*. He talked to me so incessantly that my head ached heavily when he went away. The carriage, a most remarkably yellow vehicle, with a large black hood, came round at nine o'clock; and, after a most profuse and notable leave-taking, the Duponts drove away, monsieur putting out his head, just as the carriage passed out of sight, to repeat his farewell gestures.

My head ached, and I was sorely tired; but still I had not been bored; as the abbé had said, Monsieur Dupont carried his own amusement with him. There was a sprightliness in his talk and a quick perception of the nature of others which gave him the power of being generally pleasant. He talked a good deal of himself and his wife, but always with a point of interest to his listeners. I felt so utterly incapable of filling such a *rôle*, that I was more merciful than I had previously been to Monsieur Dupont.

CHAPTER L.

ANXIETY.

The days went by so slowly while we waited; but no news came of Captain Brand.

One day Madame La Peyre told me that the abbé must go to Paris for a few days, and that, as the carriage must take him to Yvetôt, if I chose, I might meet it as it returned, and go on with Angélique to see Marie Touchet.

After breakfast the abbé asked me to come to his study. His manner was so grave that I felt troubled; but he left me no time for anxiety.

"My dear child," he said, "I am going to Paris on other business, but I am also going to see if definite tidings cannot be gathered about Captain Brand. I did not tell you, because it seemed better to wait; but a letter from his London agent crossed mine the day after I wrote. This letter says the ship is long overdue, and that no tidings have been heard of it, or of the captain. The agent writes to ascertain if we can give any information."

"Did you hear what Monsieur Dupont said?"

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"Yes, yes, my child; but you must not look so scared and sad. I have seen your sadness, Gertrude. There are always plenty of these idle rumors. The agent goes on to say that the delay may be attributed to some contingency occasioned by the severe winter."

"But, then, how long can this doubt last?"

He looked grave again, and I felt that he tried to smile against his own conviction.

"You want to make me a prophet, my dear child. Let us hope that very soon indeed we may be called on to welcome Captain Brand at Château-Fontaine. But a fresh letter this morning tells me of the death of Captain Brand's mother. She has died suddenly, without a will. However, as it appears that she has derived her income solely from her son, this is not of much consequence, except that, as there are no other relatives, you are placed in a more responsible position."

I did not understand the abbé. I was too sad. I had refused to go and live with this mother; and now she had died alone, perhaps —evidently without one of her own people beside her.

I said "Good-by" to the abbé, and then I went to find Angélique. I did not feel in spirits for our expedition, and I thought I would ask her to defer it. It seemed impossible to go out for a day's pleasure when such a sorrow had come to Captain Brand. But, looking down into the hall from the great, square gallery, I saw Angélique with an unusually happy face putting last touches to the packing of two baskets, offerings evidently for Marie Touchet.

I am still selfish, then. My first thought is to shut myself up, and brood over this anxiety — regardless of the disappointment both of Angélique and of Marie Touchet.

So we started as soon as it was considered possible for the carriage to have deposited the abbé at Yvetôt, and to have reached on its way home the turn in the road leading over the hill to St.-Arnould.

Angélique trudged along with a basket on each arm—broad, flat, open baskets, made of white-wood shavings; one was covered with a snow-white cloth, and, I fancy, held butter and eggs; but in the other was a live brown hen, held in bondage by a bright-orange handkerchief fastened across the basket.

Angélique was in singularly gay spirits. She had not been so far from home for months; and she pointed out to me the tender green of the hawthorn-leaves as we walked along the white, hedge-bordered road, and the green banks below, gay with blue lilies and gemmed with pink-and-blue and starry-white flowers. From these hedges, and from the trees which at intervals rose from them, and stretched across the road, rose a perpetual chorus. The birds strained their tiny throats in praise of the exquisite spring sunshine. Here and there the hedges gave place to a low stone fence; and stretches of cornland appeared in place of the hedge-bordered meadows, and then came a more intense melody from above from the tiny brown bird poised like a speck near the clouds. We found the carriage waiting, and the stout pair of gray Norman horses carried us rapidly up-hill toward St.-Arnould.

Just before we reached Marie's cottage, the road descended steeply; it had evidently been cut through a densely-planted fir-wood, for the yellow banks were bare of herbage, and only varied by the protruding roots of the dark trees above, and occasional patches of heather, velvet-brown, with last year's shriveled bells dotting the bright-hued sand.

I was looking up at this wood, and all at once I saw a man's face peering down at us from between the tree-trunks; but, even while I looked, it vanished.

"I should not like to come here in the dark, Angélique. How easily robbers could hide in that wood!"

"But mademoiselle may be tranquil; there has never been a robbery here. The people of St.-Arnould are very good and orderly; and, besides, it is not often that strangers go there."

This is all very well, but we have scarcely seen a house since we left Château-Fontaine; and, in that thick wood, robbers could hide themselves easily.

A sudden opening on the left brought us to a kind of gravel-pit, surrounded by the thick verdure of the pine-wood. In the centre were two small cottages, with green doors and lattice windows. A vine spread its bare brown arms over the fronts of both cottages, and reached even unto the thatch above, where there was a colony of house-leek and stone-crop.

"This is Marie's cottage, mademoiselle."

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The carriage had stopped, and Angélique got out, and held the door open for me.

I felt a little disappointed. I had imagined a picturesque village, grouped round a little church; these two lonely cottages, with their hard, yellow background, were not specially attractive.

"Will mademoiselle give herself the trouble of following me?"

Angélique went on and tapped at the door of the largest of the two cottages. She waited, but there was no answer, and then she rapped her knuckles harder against the green door.

Still no answer came. Angélique's hand was on the latch, when I saw the window in the next cottage moving; it opened, and a very ugly, brown woman's face appeared; it was a different kind of ugliness from Rosalie's—a broad, misshapen face, but with honest, dull-gray eyes, and no malice on its heavy, blue-lipped mouth.

"Tenez, mesdames; is it, then, to see Marie Touchet that they are come, these ladies?"

"Berthe"—Angélique spoke as if the huge-faced woman was a child—"this is mademoiselle from the château, who I told you would come some day. Come, Berthe, thou knowest la Mère Angélique—what, then, has happened to Marie Touchet?"

There was a loud clattering of *sabots* as Berthe's ugly, vacant face left the window, and, when the door opened, the space was filled by her huge, squat figure; her great feet, encased in black *sabots*, were bare; and her apron, though clean, was full of rents; instead of a cap, her head was swathed in a pink handkerchief, with a little horn over each ear.

"*Plait-il?*" she said, stolidly, to Angélique; but she looked at me.

"How is Marie, and why is she locked in?"

Berthe shook her head.

"La Mère Angélique knows Berthe is a dunce"—she looked hard at me while she spoke—"and yet she asks two things at once! *Ma foi*, what can a poor girl do?"

Berthe must surely be fifty; I began to think she was an idiot.

"Is Marie ill?" Angélique went back to the door and tried to open it.

"*Mon Dieu!*" Berthe opens her mouth and eyes, and stares still harder at me. "Will la Mère Angélique give herself the patience to wait?"

She clatters along in her huge *sabots* to the little green door, and then, stretching up a brown, hairy arm, she feels along the top of the door, and at last produces a key.

She looks at it, and then at us; then, pushing one broad set of fingers in among her wisps of rough hair, she grins at last broadly. "*Tenez*, Madame Angélique, this is what I am to say if any one inquires for Marie Touchet—she is not at her cottage; how shall she be there with her key outside? She is not at St.-Arnould"—here she falters, and she looks first at one of us and then at the other, to help her memory.

"She is at Caudebec, *bien*," says Angélique, and takes the key.

"No, no, no!"—Berthe shakes her head vehemently, and plants herself stubbornly in front of the closed door—"it is not so; that is not the message which Marie has taught Berthe to say if any one should come to see her from Château-Fontaine." Then she begins again, in a dreamy, monotonous voice, like a child saying a lesson: "Marie is not at her cottage, nor at St.-Arnould." I smile, but Angélique shakes her head; she sees that only our patience will help poor Berthe's straying wits. "She is not even at Caudebec—she is with Fifine, she is on the road to St.-Wandrille. Aha!"—Berthe looks round in sudden triumph—"our Fifine has a baby, and, when Marie has seen that they are all right, she is coming back very soon, perhaps to-day, to Berthe."

"How long has she been gone, my girl?"

Angélique puts her hand on the great, rough woman's shoulder, and looks persuasive.

"See here"—and Berthe points to six pins in front of her gown—"Marie has said she will be gone but six days, and I have put in a pin for every day. *Mon Dieu!* I have no pins left; yes, yes, it is sure that Marie will come to-day."

She moves away, and Angélique unlocks the door. All the windows are closed, and, as I follow, the air feels horribly close.

"Mademoiselle will wait, will she not?" Angélique turns round, and stands in my way. "This room has been closed so long that it is unwholesome."

"I will just stay and air it, and leave the things I have brought for Marie, and then I will come to mademoiselle."

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I turn away, glad to escape. I had been so anxious to visit a French cottage, but not one that has been shut up for six days.

I go back to the carriage, and Berthe follows Angélique.

It is a lovely afternoon; there is just breeze enough to bring the fragrance of the pine-trees to where I sit. The scent sets me thinking of Mrs. Dayrell, she so loved it.

At Merdon one of my amusements had been to collect fir-cones, and to dry them for Mrs. Dayrell's fire. She had so few pleasures, that Madame La Peyre was always devising little enjoyments for her.

It is a year since Mrs. Dayrell's death, and yet how vividly the terrible scene comes back as I sit waiting beside the gravel-pit! I can see now what was so puzzling at Merdon, the likeness between myself and this poor, self-willed woman—and she saw it all through, and from her first knowledge of the marriage urged me to submit to my husband. If I had listened to her at Merdon, there was yet time; now it is too late. Captain Brand's forbearance seems to me to have been almost superhuman, but that is just the reason why he will not forgive—he cannot stoop to my level; he will never consent to have a wife he cannot trust, and he will never believe in me. If I could even say, "I love you," with my whole heart, he would not believe, and I can never say this, for I can never again deceive. This thought often comes, and it brings with it intense pain. Although I am safely sheltered within the old-fashioned, close carriage, I shrink back into a corner of it, and cover my eyes with my hand.

But the next moment I am startled out of my sadness by the opening of the carriage-door.

It is Eugène who opens it, and, as I sit staring in dumb terror, he steps into the carriage, closes the door, and seats himself opposite to me.

I am not long dumb.

"Monsieur de Vaucresson, you ought not to come here! I told you distinctly I never wished to see you again."

I look at him severely, but he does not laugh in his teasing, mocking way; he is very sad, and I fancy even humble.

"Ah, madame, can you then refuse to listen just for a moment? Your nature is different from mine; you can love one month and forget the next; with me it is different. Never till I saw you did I know what love meant. Never can I forget the love which you have created in my heart. You have created it," he said, impetuously, "and you are bound to listen to your own creation; you shall hear me say, 'I love you'—even if the next moment you trample on my heart!"

His words sound false, and yet the voice in which he speaks has reality in it. I look up and see tears in his eyes. I tremble, and yet I am not really moved. I feel calm and quiet.

"Monsieur de Vaucresson, you are giving us both needless pain. I—I do not love you; I know now that I never really loved you; and I wish you to leave me at once."

He gives a little start, and then he frowns.

"You are not prudent, my charming friend. You should not defy a man when you cannot help listening to him."

"You are mistaken, monsieur; Angélique is close by in that cottage, and Madame La Peyre's coachman is on the box."

"I know every thing, my friend; ah, I am your friend, though you will not believe it! I know also that you will keep quiet. Baptiste is so deaf that you can never make him hear as long as I choose to keep the carriage-door shut."

Instead of feeling frightened, a strong, determined courage comes to me.

"You can, of course, stay here, monsieur, if you are resolved to be where you are not wanted; but I refuse to speak to you again."

"Listen, Gertrude—you cannot be so romantic as to think that this sudden meeting has come by chance—listen, and do not provoke me by that affected air of indifference. You are angry with me, and I do not wonder; ah, you begin to listen now; *bon*—you would have a just right to be angry if I had been as faithless as I have been made to appear when you left me so suddenly in the garden. I wrote letter after letter. I haunted the château for days. You wrote to me, but what then? I recognized fear and compulsion in the dear little note which I yet kissed and placed next my heart. Then I heard of your illness, and in despair I traveled, I gambled—what will you?—I indulged in a hundred mad follies to quiet my torments and my anxiety. The other day, in Paris, suddenly I hear that English merchant-ships have perished on the northern coast of America, and I remember to have heard that your

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husband was bound there. Well, Gertrude, what do I do? I say to myself, 'There is my love, my dear little friend, perhaps a widow, and even her English ideas will no longer refuse my friendship.' I go to Château-Fontaine. I go there—ah, my sweet friend, your face tells me you have not known of my visit; the Père Alphonse is a very clever and discreet priest, and I see well that I must be wary and watch for his absence if I mean to take you at unawares; so I return to Yvetôt. I know that the abbé has already staid a long time in this country, and that he must soon return to Paris. This morning, as I sit in my room, I see the abbé pass by in the carriage. *Bon*—an idea presents itself, and I seize it. I know well how deaf and how stupid is Baptiste, and when the abbé leaves the carriage I get in, and Baptiste, doubting nothing, drives me to the point where he stops to wait for you. Then I descend and arrive as from the opposite quarter in front of Baptiste, and I say, '*Holà, mon cher*, whom do you wait for?' and then the wise and discreet Baptiste, when at last he hears me, says, 'I wait for mademoiselle and la Mère Angélique, and I conduct them to the cottage of Marie Touchet.' See, what a transparent little mystery! Then I enter the wood and hurry on as fast as possible, and at last I see Angélique go into the cottage, and I find my treasure here."

And now he flings himself on his knees. "My treasure will reward me; she will say just once, in her sweet, delicious voice, 'Eugène, I love thee.'"

I cannot speak—I tremble with shame and anger; I cannot escape while he kneels there. Oh, how could I ever have dreaded this man's influence? I feel that I loathe and detest him.

"Monsieur"—at last my voice comes back—"if you will not spare me, spare yourself; do not make me say that I dislike you and shrink from you."

He rises quickly, and bursts out in a torrent, first of adoring flattery and then of reproach. I try not to listen, but I feel crushed with shame and choked by the angry replies I long to make, and yet I know that silence is my only safe weapon now.

Perhaps the bitterest part of my shame lies in the thought that for this weak, vain man's admiration I despised and deceived my husband. I may never love Captain Brand, but I must always reverence him. Which is the real Eugène de Vaucresson—the merry boy I dreamed into an idol, or this man, so insatiable in his vanity that he would run any risk to gratify it, for every word that he has said shows vanity, not love? Even when he taunts me with my faithlessness, I cannot feel that he really loves me. Presently he pauses, and his tone changes.

"You are thinking of a new marriage; is it not so?" he says.

I look surprised, and he goes on fast:

"You heard what I said just now; I tell you that you are a widow."

For a few moments I am chilled and awestruck by the word, but then I recover.

"I do not think you have any sure proof; but, even were your news true, monsieur, I have no wish to marry."

He shrugs his shoulders with impatience.

"You mistake me, my charming friend; I am not pleading for myself. But surely, as a widow, you cannot object to a renewal of our friendship. Give me your hand in pledge, and we will forget and forgive, will we not, my Gertrude?"

He has seated himself again, and, before he can stop me, I open the door, and spring out. I have nearly reached the cottage-door, panting in my haste, when Angélique opens it.

I suppose my agitated face frightens her. She looks round at once, to see what has moved me. I look toward the carriage; but there it stands empty, the door is closed, and deaf Baptiste is sound asleep on the box.

While Angélique says "Good-by" to Berthe, I take counsel with myself, and resolve only to tell the abbé of this meeting with Eugène de Vaucresson.

CHAPTER LI.

LOOKING BACK.

In my journal I find a long entry, recording my journey home after that eventful meeting, and the sort of old, grown-up sternness that filled my heart respecting the count. But what is actual in this life? I do not know. It seems to me that we are the sport of circumstances; that which seems a black misfortune becomes of a far lighter hue when some deeper loss falls beside it; and an event

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of much importance to-day is slight—trivial even—in our estimation when compared with that which happens on the morrow.

And so it is with me to-day. Now that the sad certainty of bereavement has fallen on my life, my heart feels closed to minor trials. I almost smile, even in this aching sorrow, to think how large a place my vexation with the count held in my thoughts. For he seems to me only a foolish boy, and I feel like a grief-stricken, full-grown woman.

Well, I will begin at the beginning.

We were expecting the abbé home again. He had been away a month, and had written me most kind and cheering letters. He had been indefatigable in making inquiry, but had not gained any definite tidings. In his last letter to Madame La Peyre he said he was going to England for a few days, in consequence of some information which had reached him. He did not say what this information was, but the letter ended thus:

"I do not suppose I shall write again, but you may expect me a week after you receive this. I will get a carriage at Caudebec, and drive over. I take this journey because it seems to me that nothing can be so bad for our child as suspense; any certainty is preferable."

I wondered whether the abbé meant me to read that sentence; it seemed like a doom, but I did not say so, as I gave the letter back to Madame La Peyre, and she plainly read it differently.

"Perhaps he may bring Monsieur le Capitaine with him," madame says.

"Perhaps," and then I wish the week and more than the week was over, and that I knew the end.

That week seemed to go slowly, and yet the time itself did not hang heavily.

I had many friends in the village now. There was the miller's wife, who used to chatter my head nearly off when I paid her charming mill a visit. When I was not too tired, her delight was to take me up to the top-story and show me the view over the Seine; and then, when I came down with my black skirts powdered with flour, she used to run away for a brush and come back screaming with laughter, a couple of pears in one hand, which mademoiselle was to eat while she brushed. But last year's pears were dry and withered, and the fresh ones in the Roussel orchard were not ripe. So to-day madame had given me instead a *galette*, which she said was delicious, but which I could not succeed in swallowing. When Madame Roussel turned away to scold her ugly maid Marie, I flung the *galette* to a long-legged black pig which had been curiously eying me.

I came home late and tired, and found Angélique at the gate.

"*Tenez*," she said—how bright a smile came over her dear brown face when she saw me!—"I feared mademoiselle was faint or ill, and Rosalie and I have made all ready for Monsieur l'Abbé, so I came to see for my child."

I was so tired that I had taken her arm, and she patted my hand tenderly as she spoke.

I had meant to keep my resolution a secret, but just now I felt drawn very close to Angélique.

"You dear old nurse," I said, softly, "suppose any one comes with the abbé and takes me away from Château-Fontaine?"

A struggle came in her face. I saw her lips quiver so that I had no longer strength to watch them—oh, how could I leave these two dear loving women and go away with a man I felt afraid of? I leaned on Angélique's shoulder and sobbed.

"*Allons*, mademoiselle," she says, briskly, but I see that she rubs her eyes vigorously with the knuckles of her other hand—"*allons*, what will monsieur say if mademoiselle has red eyes when he comes home?" A little pause, and then she says: "Mademoiselle will be brave and good, and then she will find happiness; it always lies on the road where we least look for it."

I cannot answer; I suppose I am weak and overdone, but I cry unrestrainedly when we reach the château. I kiss Angélique, and run away and bathe my eyes. None too soon. Almost before I have changed my dress, and arranged myself for dinner, comes the well-known grate which bespeaks an arrival.

I make as much haste as I can, but, as I reach the staircase-gallery, I see the abbé going into the *salon*.

It is daylight, but, though the abbé's back is toward me, I see the reflection of his tidings in madame's sad, scared face.

I do not know what I say; I find myself beside the abbé, grasping his arm with both hands.

He puts his hand on my head. "May

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God bless my child!" He speaks so tenderly that a certainty of evil settles on my heart. "My Gertrude, there is no definite proof; there is nothing—but I fear we shall never see our dear friend on earth again."

Then he places me gently in a chair, and there is a long silence, only broken by the sobs of Madame La Peyre. I could not cry—my heart was frozen, and checked words and tears.

CHAPTER LII.

HOPING AGAINST HOPE.

WHAT weary days and nights have gone by! The abbé and Madame La Peyre have given up all hope, and I suppose I ought to yield it too.

I can see the abbé thinks I am giving way to self-will in this want of submission, and doubtless he is right. He has always been right before. I thought I had learned by this time how much safer I was when I did not try to guide my own life; but it will be the same; to the end I shall be one person in theory, and another when temptation calls for action. The only weight on my side now is, that I think Angélique is not altogether hopeless. She will not give her opinion against Monsieur l'Abbé, but she is silent; and once, a few days ago, when madame said I must have my new dress trimmed with crape, Angélique stood waiting in silence for my order with a most inscrutable look on her face.

The abbé has told me that for some time to come things must remain exactly as they are. He says that, as Captain Brand was hurried away on this last voyage before he could take any steps about the marriage, his property belongs to me. I cried out against this; but the abbé says there is no alternative, that probably the captain's will has anticipated this event, and that, when the necessary time shall have elapsed, I shall have to go to London and see the lawyer. He added that he thought it would be well for me to remain under his sister's care at present; afterward, if I wished it, I could return to Tasmania.

I hurry over this talk, for it added misery to my sorrow. I had always shrunk from his undeserved generosity; for it was terrible to benefit by his loving care now when I could never give even duty in exchange.

I had already saved quite a little hoard out of the allowance transmitted to Madame La Peyre. I felt oppressed at the idea of further riches. I could not sleep that night; and I resolved to find out Angélique's real opinion.

It was raining so very fast that probably there was a long day to spend in-doors. I have learned, in this weary waiting, the help and comfort that are to be found in the mere breathing of outside air, and I shrank dismayed from a dreary day in the dark, old house.

When I left the abbé's study, I went down to Angélique's den. For a wonder, she was there, with spectacles on, darning a pair of the abbé's black-silk stockings.

"You poor old dear, you will blind yourself. You can give me those stockings to mend; you know I glory in doing any thing for my darling *père*."

Angélique shook her head.

"No, no; this is too tedious. Mademoiselle can knit some silk mittens for the winter for Monsieur l'Abbé. Ah, mademoiselle, look how nearly all the leaves have fallen. Winter will be here directly."

I looked out of the window.

Yes, so it will; we are in the last days of October; the days, till to-day, have been bright, and full of warm sunshine, although the evenings have given warning that the noonday heat was not real summer come back. This glow is only like the bloom that we see sometimes on the cheek of a woman of middle years, the last flower before chill age asserts its sway; and this remembrance of the time of year, although, indeed, I have been counting the weeks too carefully to need such a remembrance, makes my heart still heavier.

I sit down, and watch Angélique's nimble fingers as she deftly sends her long needle in and out of the fine silken web. I forget my purpose of getting something to do.

Presently Angélique looks up.

"Mademoiselle is very thoughtful."

"You mean I am very idle. I am like the tiresome, lazy girl you had such trouble with at Merdon."

Angélique sighs.

"What are you sighing for? You surely do not mean that you liked me better then? Why, I try to be good chiefly to please you, you naughty woman."

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"Mademoiselle, I must answer truly, or I must be silent. I think I have always loved mademoiselle for herself. It makes me happier to see mademoiselle more peaceful, because I know she is then happy; but sometimes I wish I could see her as gay and bright as she used to be."

I find myself crying.

"Angélique," I say, after a bit, "you make a mistake between happiness and content. It is not likely I can ever be what I call happy again."

"What is it that mademoiselle wishes to make her happy?" and the dear woman looks at me so wistfully that I believe, if I asked for the topmost brick of Château-Fontaine, she would begin to inquire for a long ladder.

"I can never have it now, so there is no use in talking of it."

And, as I speak, it seems to me that my idea of happiness is hazy and indefinite; it is far more a longing for a future which might possibly exist than a desire for a known good.

Angélique darns on a little longer, and I watch her fingers and wonder whether bones will ever show in my knuckles, instead of dimples, and whether my finger-nails will ever become ribbed like Angélique's.

How vain and silly I am! why not wonder instead whether I shall ever get that serene peace in my heart which shines out of Angélique's eyes, and seems to brighten what would without it be a hard, ascetic face?

All at once she puts down her work, and looks at me very earnestly.

"Mademoiselle has decided that she will never see monsieur her husband again?"

I feel the color rush over my face under those searching eyes; but I must undeceive Angélique.

"I want to know presently what you think; but listen. I long to see Captain Brand for just one or two things; but the happiness I have dreamed of at times in my life is not connected with the thought of him. I am much happier here with you and madame and Monsieur l'Abbé than I could be"—I stopped; there was no need to betray my resolution to Angélique, so I said, "elsewhere. But about Captain Brand: you know, Angélique, that he has been very good; I cannot tell you how good he has been to me, and he is, of course, my husband"—I have wanted to say this a long, long time; Angélique has so much sense that she will accept my change of ideas without asking questions—"but I want you to tell me honestly whether you agree with the abbé, or whether you think the ship may be heard of. If the abbé is right, then it seems to me that I am a widow, and that I ought to dress and be like a widow."

Angélique does not look at me as she answers.

"Monsieur l'Abbé is wiser than I am, mademoiselle. My opinion is of no value, and I do not think dress has much to do with sorrow. Mademoiselle has very seldom smiled since first the bad news came, and she wears mourning still."

She went back to her work, and she looked, I thought, disappointed. I knew what she meant; she thought that, as I had refused to consider myself Captain Brand's wife while he lived, it was a mere sentiment to pass myself off as his widow, now that there was no chance of his claiming wifely duty from me. But I had not finished all I had come to say:

"I said I was happy here; but that is not true. I feel like the idle boy in the spelling-book. Ah, I suppose you know nothing of that dear old book, Angélique? Every one at Château-Fontaine has something special to do, is a part of the household; but, if I went away to-morrow, who would miss me?" I tried to speak steadily; this thought had been growing a long time, but I had never got courage to utter it; the idea even of leaving Château-Fontaine was so sad.

"Everybody would miss mademoiselle; she brings the sunshine into the house."

"And just now you said I had been dull since the spring. No, no, Angélique; besides, sunshine is not always wanted. Sunshine only would scorch and wither, and there would be neither fruit nor flowers. I study with Monsieur l'Abbé, and I like my studies, but they only benefit me. I cannot see what real use I am to any living creature. I believe you are all fond of me, and so are Berthe and Madame Roussel."

"Mademoiselle is unjust to herself. Every one loves her. Madame Roussel told me on Sunday she counts the days between the visits of mademoiselle; and, as to poor Berthe, she cries when she speaks of her. Poor Berthe! She is very lonely now, for Marie

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Touchet has grown so infirm that she is to live with Fifine and Monsieur Léon. *Tenez*, and mademoiselle is smiling; it is no smiling matter to our poor Berthe."

"I am smiling because of a new thought that came to me in the night: do you know, Angélique, I shall ask Monsieur l'Abbé if I may adopt Berthe? She is not more than twice as old as I am, and I shall try and teach her, and make her more sensible, if I can."

Angélique looked extremely doubtful.

"Mademoiselle, it is very difficult to teach where the good God has not given understanding. Madame has tried, and I have tried also, but"—here she gave such a deep, sobbing sigh that I could hardly believe it came from my self-controlled Angélique, and I knew that she was thinking of Rosalie—"but we cannot succeed; still, mademoiselle is younger and more clever, only 'tis a long way to St.-Arnould."

"I have thought of that; I could not do it as long as Berthe lives at St.-Arnould, but I believe old Mathieu would lodge Berthe, if he were paid for it, and if madame permitted him to take a lodger."

And I thought that at last I found a way of spending Captain Brand's money that he would have approved.

"Mademoiselle will hear what Monsieur l'Abbé says; it would be very good for Berthe, and"—Angélique stopped, and then went on with an effort—"it may be—for Berthe is good and docile—that she will not be so difficult to teach as one who is not froward; but still I think mademoiselle will find it tedious to persevere, and, when she can see Berthe every day, there will be no longer the excitement of going to see her."

"You read me like a book"—I patted her shoulder, for she looked timid at having said so much—"but, even suppose that I do get tired, I shall have done Berthe no harm. I mean to try to teach her to read and to keep her hair neat, and be cleaner; for you know, Angélique, that, though she is so devout, Berthe is not at all nice in her ways. I expect old Mathieu's example will be extremely good for her, although he does take such huge pinches of snuff."

"Mathieu is very good," said Angélique, with a sigh, "and I think he will like to have some one with him always, for he wants some one to listen to his stories, and Berthe likes listening better than talking."

I had no peace till I found the abbé; it was wonderful how bright I felt myself under the excitement of my project, only I wanted it all settled at once. I was disappointed when the abbé looked doubtful, referred me to Madame La Peyre, and advised me to think over the plan for a week before I mentioned it to either Mathieu or Berthe.

"But why, *mon père?* Surely I have made up my mind; and do you not think it good for me to have a decided occupation?"

He smiled. "I do not think you are idle; you cultivate your mind, and you are always doing something for Madame La Peyre or for me."

"Not much, I think; but I see," I laughed, "Monsieur l'Abbé is jealous. He thinks that, when I really have a child of my own—for, of course, Berthe will be my child now—I shall neglect him."

"It is not that, naughty child," the abbé said, with the sweet, fatherly smile that seems always to go straight to my heart; "but, Gertrude, there is a far more serious reason. I do not forbid you to do this—on the contrary, I think it may be useful both to you and to your *protégée*. But you are very young still, and it is probable that, when this mourning is over, and you mix in the world, you will marry."

"I shall never mix in the world, and certainly I shall never marry."

The abbé looked at me with the same peculiar expression I have so often seen in Angélique. At Merdon it always puzzled me; now I read in it a gentle wonder that, after so many mistakes, I can feel sure about myself.

"Very well, *mon père;* then you will allow me to adopt Berthe if I promise that, in any case, she shall always be provided for?"

"Yes, if you will make your promise a certainty. But that matter is best settled by your lawyer, and for the present nothing can be done of that kind."

"But, in the mean time, I may speak to Mathieu and Berthe?" I feel very sad; I see the abbé will not let me cling to hope.

I fancy my sadness must have shown in my face, his next words were so tender.

"Yes, yes, my dear child, you shall do as you like. Come with me to Eugénie, and we will arrange every thing; she will be your authority with Mathieu; and, if you like, we will drive over to St.-Arnould as soon as the rain ceases."

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CHAPTER LIII.

MY PROTÉGÉE.

In two days Berthe was installed in the cottage with so many doors and windows. Madame La Peyre and Angélique seemed to find great pleasure in furnishing one of the empty rooms for Berthe out of a *grenier* filled with lumber at the top of one of those corkscrew staircases at the château. Every one entered kindly and lovingly into my plan except Rosalie; she was crosser than ever, and absolutely scowled at me. On the day when Berthe was expected to arrive, she told me when she brought my coffee that la Mère Angélique had more than enough to do already, without fussing over "les manies de mademoiselle."

Poor Rosalie! she was plainly jealous; and it came to me with a sharp pang of regret that, until Angélique's unconscious revelation the other day, I have so seldom thought of or tried to realize the loving sorrow her unhappy daughter must cause her. But I suppose Angélique accepts it, as she accepts all else, as God's will; and it may be her cheerful acceptance of this and other trials that makes her what she is. I wish I could care for Rosalie as I already care for Berthe, but Madame La Peyre has always advised me to have as little to do with Rosalie as possible. She says that any attempt to overcome her evident dislike to me will only increase it. Madame La Peyre says that this poor thing is jealous of Angélique's fondness for me.

We all went down to the cottage next morning, and Berthe's delight was good to see. She showed us every article in her room with bursts of laughter, she clapped her great hands together, then struck them violently on her sides, and could hardly be brought to listen while Madame La Peyre explained the uses of a pail and a broom and scrubbing-brush. My heart sank a little as I watched her; I felt that Angélique was right. I had certainly not realized the difficulty of my undertaking, or how very much of a female Friday in her uncouthness and ignorance I had planted in the quiet cottage of the old *concierge*.

I wonder if I am right in doing this? Berthe is good and devout, and she is as likely to love God as much as if she was clever and better taught—is it only for my own selfish ends that I have brought her here? But, even while I stand doubting, Madame La Peyre gives me comfort.

"You must have been very sad and lonely without Marie Touchet," she says, in her sweet, loving way, to my gaping, staring *protégée*.

Berthe stares, and a look of stolid misery clouds her face.

"*Dame!*" she says, "the weeks have gone, and the days and nights, but Berthe does not know them; what can she know without Marie? Berthe did not know when to go to mass, unless by the market-carts the day before. Berthe saw a sick rabbit creep into its hole, and one day Berthe thought she would like to creep into the wood and never come out again. Berthe cannot cook, she cannot sew, when Marie is not there to tell her." Great tears came rolling down her broad face.

After this I had no more doubts. I often came back from my daily visit to the cottage wearied out of patience by my pupil's dense stupidity and neglect of her common duties, but Berthe was so uniformly humble and good-tempered that I always felt ashamed of my own want of patience. Mathieu, too, was on her side. He seemed to consider her in the light of a faithful dog, and, on one occasion, he actually took a journey to Rouen, and left the cottage and all his duties in charge of poor, awkward Berthe.

So the days passed by, and, although I could not give up hope or forget my suspense, I had no longer the same dull blank in my life. I knew almost every one in the village, and sometimes got as far as the Maison Blanche, and paid a visit to handsome, stern-looking Madame Vagnon. I admired this woman, and I sometimes found there her sister, the lame lace-mender, Henriette. I had grown to love the little old woman, so like a withered leaf. Her face looked suffering, but she was blithe and merry as a bird. When I found Henriette with Madame Vagnon, I always came home in good spirits.

There had been some talk of going to Rouen at the beginning of the year, but I always kept silent; it seemed to me, if we left Château-Fontaine, news might come during our absence, and perhaps might never reach us.

The weather was growing less severe, and I sometimes went down to give Berthe her

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reading-lesson before our mid-day breakfast, for, at Château-Fontaine, Madame La Peyre suited her habits to the abbé's.

I came in one morning less tired than usual. As I began to go up-stairs, Madame La Peyre came out into the hall, from the *salle-à-manger*.

"I was coming to look for you, my child." She often came to meet me, and she often said these words; but to-day, as I met her and kissed her, I saw tears on her eyelashes, and I heard a new tone in her voice.

"What is it? oh, please tell me!" I said, in quick terror. "Is there news?"

She took my hand, and drew me with her into the room.

The abbé sat at the breakfast-table, but he was not eating. His face was full of anxious sorrow.

"Does she know?" he said.

"She guesses. I have not told her." And then dear Madame La Peyre placed me between herself and the abbé, and sat holding my hand.

"There is news of the ship," the abbé says, "it has perished; many of the crew have been saved, but they seem to have suffered fearfully while the ship lay blocked in the ice." He stopped, but I could not speak; I only kept looking at him, dreading what his next words might be. "The captain has suffered most of all, and it is better to tell you at once, Gertrude: the letter says there is scarcely any hope of his recovery."

I felt too much stunned to understand.

"Why did we not hear this sooner?"

"I fancy we have heard with as little delay as possible. These suffering men could not rescue themselves, though it appears that, in trying to reach a supposed point of communication, the captain, who undertook the task, has suffered terribly from his fearful journey across trackless fields of ice. When, at last, succor was found, the poor creatures were so helpless and disabled that they had to be nursed into life before they could give an account of themselves. This news seems to have reached London only a few days ago."

"Then we shall have more news soon?"

I felt that I was speaking in a horribly calm voice, as if Captain Brand's life or death were indifferent to me; the abbé looked surprised.

"We shall have, I fear, very sad news in a few days; but still it will be better to know the truth, will it not, my child?"

"Yes."

The abbé sat in silence a few moments, and then he went away, and left me with Madame La Peyre.

She clasped her arms round me. "My poor darling!" she said, in a soothing voice. I kissed her, but I could not show any of the sorrow that was swelling my heart. Why should Madame La Peyre sorrow so much for me? I had never done or said any thing to evince my changed feelings for Captain Brand. She could not have penetrated into my heart, and seen there that which I had never even guessed at myself. It was too late for repentance, too late for sorrow; not one tear would come to ease the dreadful weight at my heart.

I soon made an excuse to leave Madame La Peyre. I said I would go and lie down. I crept up-stairs feebly; all strength had gone out of me, and I almost fell down on my bed. There I lay, cold and tearless, gazing on the two pictures I drew, and which seemed to stand actually before my eyes—my last parting with him, and his suffering in the ice-bound ship. My heart ached more and more. It did not feel like grief, it was so much more awful. I felt that I could laugh much more easily than I could cry. I thought of him with timid reverence, and then with sudden, sharp agony, as I tried to realize the suffering he must have undergone in his efforts to save his crew. He had lived his whole life for others, and he had given it up at last in their service. Well, why should I sorrow? What sympathy could such a nature as his have found in mine that I had not been able to act out my resolution? And yet his great and noble love had so glorified me, and gifted me with qualities, that he had dreamed of finding happiness with me!

"Ah, well!" I said, in my agony; "then, instead of sorrow, I should feel joy—joy that he has been suffered to escape me. How can I—I feel one real regret that he has been taken away from such a creature as I am?"

But this mood was too high-pitched for reality. I had not strength to keep to such self-abnegation, and, as I summoned up every meeting with him, and tried to recall every look and word, my heart suddenly melted, and seemed as if it would dissolve in the great

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passion of tears that overwhelmed me. All through these months I had multiplied fences and restraints; I had choked the smallest outlet of sympathy toward him; and now I knew, by a sudden instinctive revelation, that I had been doing this, of late, consciously, and that this mighty tide of emotion, so long checked and kept out of my own sight, had, at one impetuous leap, burst through all my dikes and fences, and was carrying me where it would in its resistless progress.

I sorrowed still, deeply, humbly; but it was a happier sorrow, for I felt that he would have been satisfied with the way I mourned him.

CHAPTER LIV.

AT LAST.

The winter has passed away, and the stern, cold silence of out-door life is once more gone with it. The birds seem to spend all the morning in telling one another their adventures during the long months that have passed since they left our woods. Angélique smiles and shakes her head when I say this. She maintains that if I get up early enough I shall hear the birds sing a lovely hymn of praise, and that after this they begin to gossip and quarrel over nest-building and feeding their young.

I am standing on the steps listening to this cheerful colony, for the birds do seem so much gayer and happier than people are—they have fewer griefs.

Madame La Peyre comes out, and joins me.

"Listening to the birds, Gertrude? I believe they know thee, and give thee an extra welcome."

"And yet they do not love me so well as they love Angélique. At Merdon I used to think the pigeons and farm-yard creatures loved her; but here the birds are always flying round her when she goes across the park."

Madame La Peyre makes no answer, and, silence being a very unusual habit with her, I look quickly at her.

She is gazing at me with such a happy face! I have not seen so much brightness in her sweet old eyes for months. I am so glad to see her so happy, and I say so as I kiss her.

She puts her soft arms round me, and says in my ear:

"Does my child remember what the abbé said last week?"

I cannot understand her. She seems to have forgotten her usual sweet sympathy. I am as hasty as ever now and then, and I draw a little away from my dear old friend. The abbé had said that, if no news came of Captain Brand by my nineteenth birthday, I must go to London and see the lawyer who had the arrangement of my husband's affairs.

We had heard again that there was even less hope of his recovery, but that was about Christmas, and since then, in the utter silence that followed, even I had begun to feel that it was useless to cherish hope.

But this giving up had deepened my sorrow, and I wondered at Madame La Peyre's strange want of perception.

"Thou dost not ask questions, my Gertrude! Have I, then, been mistaken all this time?"

The blood seemed to rush suddenly to my temples, and yet I shivered with cold.

"O madame!" I cried out, "tell me quickly!"

She put her arm round me again. "We will go in-doors, my child; thou art not prepared—"

"No, no, no; I will hear it here at once." I grasped her two hands, and held her fast.

"Well, then," she said, entreatingly, "my child must free me. I cannot tell her while I am held so tightly."

"Pardon; you see how naughty I am."

"Yes, yes; but we understand," said Madame La Peyre, and she pulled a letter out of her pocket, and gave it to me.

I read it over and over, but I did not seem to understand it; it was written to the abbé, and signed, "George Brand."

At last I went away from Madame La Peyre, and leaned against the wall of the château; and, having thus steadied myself, I was able to gather in the sense of the words. Captain Brand had recovered, and had begun his journey home soon after the last account reached us, which explained the long silence which had followed. But he had undertaken this journey before he was equal to the task, and, in an out-of-the-way part of Canada, he had been struck down with low fever. He had lain there for weeks, and when at last he recovered he had recommenced his journey

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by very slow stages—more than once stopped altogether by a return of weakness. He had at last reached London; he was now at Havre, and he wrote to know if he could present himself at Château-Fontaine. I stopped, I felt as if I must give utterance to some of the glad thanksgiving that filled my heart. He was safe, and he was coming to me. I went on to the end of the letter, my heart seemed suddenly to stand still—all joy faded, and I shrank into myself in an agony of shame and—yes, I was obliged to feel it—bitter disappointment. The letter finished with these words:

"Perhaps you will kindly explain to my ward, Miss Stewart, that it is necessary I should see her once, as there are matters of business which she alone can decide, and yet which ought to be decided with as little delay as possible. The interview shall be short, and I wish you to be present at it."

I folded up the letter and gave it to Madame La Peyre.

"What is it, then, my child? I thought—ah, mon Dieu, art thou not then happy at last, my little one?"

"I am very glad and very happy that Captain Brand is safe"—I forced my lips into a smile—"and I hope the abbé has written to say he can come to Château-Fontaine."

"Yes, yes, he is writing; he did not think to wait for thy consent; he knew—we all knew, dearest child—the joy that thou wouldst feel to see thy good husband."

Ah, it was torture to hear this; no agony that I ever suffered had been any thing like it: my repentance had then come too late, and the love I once had was mine no longer—his letter said so.

"Madame," I said—I could not look at her as I spoke—"you mistake: Captain Brand speaks of me as his ward; he no longer considers himself my husband."

She was silent a little while, and then she opened the letter and read it.

"Courage, my child"—she came up and kissed me on both cheeks—"but that letter is written in ignorance of your changed feelings. When I shall have had the pleasure of a few minutes' talk with Monsieur le Capitaine, we shall see whether he will talk about Mademoiselle Stewart, and whether," she added, mischievously, "he will require the abbé's presence at this interview."

But at this my wits came back.

"Madame," I said, "I do not think I have ever confessed to any changed feeling in the way you mean toward Captain Brand. I respect him, I love him for his goodness, and I have learned to loathe my ingratitude and my pride; if he had wished to consider me as his wife, I was ready to try and make amends for all my bad behavior to him; but it seems to me that there are two people to be thought of; you only consider me, but I think of Captain Brand. We have not met for more than two years; when he went away he was firmly resolved to get the marriage set aside. We cannot tell that this has not been effected; and, finding himself free, Captain Brand has very likely formed another attachment, and wishes to marry some one else." I do not know how I managed to say all this; it was very hard, but I said it as if it were an established fact.

Madame La Peyre took one of my hands, placed it in her arm, and began to walk up and down the terrace.

"Gertrude"—there was such an earnest feeling in her voice that it thrilled through me—"thou hast not dealt quite openly with me."

I suppose I was too overwrought to withstand her. All my brave resolution melted.

"Forgive me," I sobbed, "but I did not mean to deceive; I did not know I should be disappointed; I meant to try and atone for the past."

"Then thou wilt let me tell the dear husband"—she stopped short, and almost hugged me in her delight. If I had not been so sad, I should have smiled at her enjoyment.

"No, madame; and, unless you promise me this, I shall go to the abbé and tell him that I refuse to see Captain Brand."

I was surprised at my own determined manner, and it evidently startled Madame La Peyre. She looked thoroughly disappointed.

She tried persuasions, coaxing, and at last tears. I found these hard to stand against; but the thought of Captain Brand kept me firm; and at last I got her to take my view of the matter.

"But thou wilt grant me this, my well-beloved child," she said, at last, when I believe she was fairly worn out by the long discussion, "if, on seeing Captain Brand, he tells thee the marriage is valid, and cannot be broken through, then I may tell him how thou hast sorrowed for him?"

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"If he tells me that, madame, I shall tell him I am going to try to be a good wife to him. And—and you may tell him what you like"—I felt confused, and restless to get away—"but you are tired, and so am I, and there is no use in supposing."

I laughed, and nodded, and ran away down the steps at a pace which I knew was beyond Madame La Peyre. I went on faster and faster. I wanted to be alone. As I reached Mathieu's cottage, I looked away fearing Berthe might come out and claim my help to rectify some of the daily mistakes which seemed to make a perpetual fog of her life. But, as I passed, my name was called, not by Berthe, but by the abbé.

"Madame said you were writing," I said, nervously.

"Yes, I have written, my child. I thought Captain Brand would wish to come as soon as possible, and Mathieu has taken the letter, and he will catch the steamer as it passes the village, and go on to Havre to Captain Brand at his hotel; and, if he is willing to come, he will bring him back to-night."

"To-night! Is it possible?" I felt stunned by this sudden news.

"There is nothing in that." He shrugged his shoulders at my wondering face. "The captain takes the train to Bolbec, and at Bolbec he takes a carriage and two horses, and by that means he will reach Château-Fontaine to-night."

"Shall I see him to-night?" I think I spoke quite as much to myself as to the abbé.

"No; he will come late, and you and Eugénie will have gone to bed. After this sudden excitement, you will both be better in the morning."

Again, a terrible fear of betrayal seemed almost to choke me.

"Monsieur l'Abbé—" I said, hastily, and then stopped, because I had no idea how to go on.

"Yes, my child." His voice had such a sad gentleness in it that, in spite of my confusion, I looked up. No, the abbé would not betray me. But the weight at my heart felt doubled all at once, for I saw what he thought.

"You—you—understand that letter as I do. Captain Brand comes simply to tell me that the marriage is not valid; and that for the future he is to be considered only as my guardian."

"Yes, my dear child," said the abbé; and, as he bowed his head, I thought I saw tears in his eyes.

"Thank you, monsieur; I knew what you would say. Will you, please, tell dear Madame La Peyre what you think?"

I did not wait for his answer, but hurried on across the planks to the other side of the river.

CHAPTER LV.

BERTHE'S TROUBLE.

I STAID in the wood till I feared my absence would create remark, arguing with myself, changing from one mood to another, without power, seemingly, to control the throbbing excitement of my thoughts.

As I climbed quickly up through the nut-wood, for to-day it seemed impossible to move slowly, I told myself that I was always governed by ideas, and not by realities. When I thought I should never see Captain Brand again, I had almost grown to believe that I loved him, and that his love was all that I wanted for happiness; I had pictured a meeting when I should have confessed my faults and my love together; I had dreamed it over and over again; and yet now, when he was actually near me—when a few hours more would bring us face to face—I shrank from this meeting with actual fear.

I saw now that it had been mortification that had so pained me this morning. I could not really wish to be Captain Brand's wife, and yet felt such a shrinking fear of him, and once more I said, "Shall I never, never know my own mind? shall I always be self-deceived?"

I suppose the abbé had advised his sister to leave me alone, for she went down to the village to see the curé in the afternoon, and I occupied myself with Berthe. When I went into the cottage she was crying. I thought she was fretting for poor old Mathieu, for she much disliked being left alone, and I said so. Instead of answering, she turned her back on me. I waited a little while, but she did not speak.

"Why do you not speak, Berthe?" I said; "I have come to be company for you while Mathieu is away."

"Dame, no!"—she shook her huge head vehemently—"it is not that; Berthe cannot

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tell it. Ah, mon Dieu! and it is mademoiselle herself who has said that all the folks at the château are good, so Berthe must believe what they say. A—a—h!" Here she broke out into a howl of anguish, and flung her blue apron over her head.

I sat down on a wooden stool, and waited till she had sobbed herself quiet again, and taken her apron from her swollen face.

"Who has been to see you, Berthe? and what is it terrible to believe?"

She looked at me in a shy, awed manner.

"It is Rosalie and Mathieu who have been here, mademoiselle;" and then she shut her mouth, and looked obstinate.

A light broke on me.

"And Rosalie has said that I am not good, eh, Berthe?"

"Ah, mon Dieu!" Berthe clasped her large, red hands, and looked at me so piteously that I could hardly help laughing. "It is not that; if Rosalie had said that, Berthe would have said it is not true, for Berthe has seen for herself that mademoiselle is good."

"Come, come, I know what Rosalie thinks of me. I shall ask her, if you won't tell, Berthe."

She stared wonderingly.

"Rosalie has said that Berthe puts her soul in danger if she loves mademoiselle." Here the poor thing crossed herself, and glanced up at me with an agony of fear in her face.

"Yes, yes, I know," I said, soothingly; "go on."

"Then Mathieu has said that he, too, loved mademoiselle very much at the beginning, and that his soul had been in danger, but Rosalie was angry with him, and taught him the truth. Oh, mon Dieu! mon Dieu! what will Berthe do?"—the poor creature sobbed—"she cannot lose her soul, and she cannot leave off loving mademoiselle."

She flung herself on her knees, and kissed my hands passionately, as they lay in my lap.

This, then, explained Mathieu's inattention and careless ways. Rosalie had told him I was a heretic. I hardly knew what to say.

"Berthe," I said, "I believe in the same God that you believe in, and He commands us all to love one another. Besides, Madame La Peyre, and Monsieur l'Abbé, and la Mère Angélique, are all better and much wiser than Rosalie and Mathieu, and they all love me."

"But yes—but yes, it is this which Rosalie has told to Berthe"—she started up eagerly at having recovered what she had forgotten—"and it is the most sad of all. Mademoiselle puts them all in danger."

She got up quickly from her knees, and actually drew away as far as she could from me.

I felt shocked and wounded.

"It is Rosalie who is wicked," I said, indignantly, "and I shall think you wicked too, Berthe, if you don't speak out."

"But it is terrible!" and she burst into another wild howl.

My anger vanished. I saw that the poor creature had been frightened out of all restraint.

"Berthe," I said, soothingly, "it is not wicked to tell me what they say—it may do me good, and to-morrow you must go to see Monsieur le Curé, and he will tell you if it is wrong to love me."

I could hardly keep my voice steady; I did not know how much I cared for the love of this poor, uncouth woman.

"Rosalie has said," she began, in the same monotonous drawl in which she always repeated what had been told her, "that a heretic belongs to Satan, and has power to bewitch. Rosalie has said that she has made a *novena* to the Blessed Virgin, that the Mère Angélique may be released from the power of mademoiselle."

She stood gazing at me with an awe-struck face, as if she expected that at the words something terrible would happen.

I stood silent, for there seemed something fiendish in Rosalie's bigotry. Then a sudden thought struck me.

"Is that holy-water in your *bénitier*, Berthe?"

I pointed to a little china stoup which Madame La Peyre had given to Berthe, and which hung on the wall beside her bed.

She nodded.

"Then sprinkle some over me, and if I am a witch I shall fly out of the window."

She gaped, but she obeyed, threw some of the water in my face, and reverently made the sign of the cross.

Then she stood waiting.

"Well," I said, "you see nothing has happened." I smiled and held out my hand.

But Berthe turned livid, and then she sank on her knees and prayed the Blessed

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Virgin and all the saints to pardon her for her wickedness. Then she kissed my hand. I believe she would have kissed my feet, but at last I managed to soothe her.

"Rosalie is wrong, she does not love me," I said as I was coming away; "but perhaps I am not kind to her."

Berthe shook her head.

"No, no; no one is wicked but Berthe. Once Monsieur Léon Leroux had a dog which bit him, and Marie Touchet has said that the dog must be shot; but mademoiselle has done much more for Berthe than a master will do for his dog, and see what Berthe has done in return."

She did not cry; she only hung her head and looked wretchedly penitent. I felt that I could not tell Berthe's usual comforter, Angélique, of Rosalie's mischief-making, but I went in search of the abbé. I knew there was nothing that would weigh with Berthe against priestly authority.

I found him in his study, writing. He listened to my story, but he did not seem so much troubled as I expected.

"Rosalie is crazy," he said; "no one in his senses listens to her. Poor Berthe, of course, must be warned against her, because she cannot judge; but Mathieu ought to know better. I cannot go and see Berthe again to-day, and I think she is best left alone, and it will not do to betray her to Rosalie and Mathieu. You must try and be heroic, my dear child; why, you are quite pale, Gertrude. I think"—he paused a moment—"that you must try a milder climate next winter; however, to-morrow we shall know definitely what your future plans are to be."

He looked at his writing, and I retired; but his last words had roused fresh thoughts. If I am really Gertrude Stewart, shall I have to go back to Tasmania to my home? I suppose I am unnatural; but I shrink from this. If my father wishes for me, it is my duty to go; but I am sure he will not wish for me. There is no love in the rare letters I receive from him and my sisters like the love that surrounds me here; they seem instead to congratulate me on my good fortune, and I fancy they will be very unwilling to have me back. I have reason to fear my father is in difficulties, and I ought not to add to them, and yet, if I stay here, I am a burden on Madame La Peyre. Could I earn my own living? I can only think of teaching music, like the dear old Rouen professor; but who would employ a young, ignorant creature like me? Besides, I could not do it. I could teach poor, ignorant people like Berthe to read; but then no one would pay me for doing that. As I think of Berthe, I remember the abbé's warning; how can I keep my promise to maintain her? I cannot ask any favor of Captain Brand now. Ah, what a sharp pang comes with his name! I cannot set down how I feel toward him; I change every hour. At this moment I feel that unless he loves me the rest of life is dark and blank, and yet not long ago I was shrinking from the prospect of to-morrow, and feeling that I could never get courage to speak one word to him.

I am so worn and wearied by dinner-time that I go to bed extra early.

CHAPTER LVI.

MY GUARDIAN.

A GENTLE knocking at my door, very different from the sharp raps which Rosalie gave when she brought my coffee.

"How is mademoiselle this morning?" said Angélique, and then she went on without any apparent consciousness of the importance of her message: "Monsieur l'Abbé has told me to say to mademoiselle that Monsieur le Capitaine Brand has arrived last night, and that he will be glad to see her, when mademoiselle is ready, in the study."

I do not know what answer I gave, but Angélique went away, and I longed to bury my head in my pillow and to stay upstairs.

Since that letter came yesterday and told me that Captain Brand's love was dead—either stamped out of his heart by some worthier object than I am, or withered out of life by his discovery of my misconduct—the shame of that last parting in the wood had come back strongly; I felt actual dread of this meeting, and I longed to ring for Angélique and ask her to go with me to the study.

But there was no use in delay—the habit which, in the beginning, I owed to Angélique, of seeking a better help than my own instead of forecasting scenes and conversations, helped me now, and, when at last I was

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ready, I went down-stairs in a calmer state than I could have thought possible.

Still, as I opened the study-door, I felt bewildered, and I saw, in a kind of dream, first the abbé and then Captain Brand come forward and greet me. But, as I looked into Captain Brand's face, the change in it roused me to reality. He looked so old—so sad—his blue eyes had sunk into his head, and his face was so thin and blanched. I stood gazing at him, letting him hold my hand. I need not have trembled with nervous dread; all thought of self was absorbed in the shock I felt.

"You have been very ill, very ill," I said, and I could hardly keep from crying.

"Yes"—ah, his voice was not changed; there was just the hopeful strength in it that had always impressed me, but how I loved its sound now!—"and monsieur tells me you, too, have had a long illness." Then he turned to the abbé and smiled: "I do not think illness has agreed with me so well as it has with Miss Stewart."

"She *looks* well now," the abbé said, gravely, "but she is not strong."

After this, there came a pause; at last I said:

"Are you really better?"

"Yes, thank you." Captain Brand was sitting, thinking, with his eyes on the ground. He roused when I spoke.

"You will have a great deal to tell us about your adventures."

"I am afraid I shall not have much time for spinning yarns"—he gave me such a pleasant smile—"I thought of going on to Paris to-night."

I longed to protest and ask him to stop; I dared not trust myself to say it, I felt that I must be very careful indeed if I meant to hide my changed feelings, and I must hide them—the ease, the smiling kindness with which he spoke to me, showed me that all his love had departed. My heart ached heavily.

"But no, monsieur," the abbé said, "we cannot consent. My sister has not even seen you, and I believe she and Angélique have been quite counting on having you to nurse—now that Gertrude is off their hands as a patient. You will give us a week at least, will you not?"

I felt that Captain Brand gave me a quick glance.

"Oh, yes," I said, "Madame La Peyre hoped you would stay some days, the rest will do you good." I tried to be friendly, and I felt that instead I had spoken formally, as if I were asking him against my will; I wished he would speak, and yet every instant of delay was a respite.

I suppose the abbé thought the suspense trying, for he said, presently:

"You had—I think—a special motive in seeking this interview with Miss Stewart."

Captain Brand turned so pale that I was frightened; I wondered whether he was ill or whether his apparent calmness was only feigned.

"Yes, you are right, monsieur," he said, stiffly, and then next minute he smiled; ah, how blind I must have been not to have seen long ago the noble directness of purpose that shone out in his smile! "I believe I am like a child—so ashamed of my former ignorance that I shrink from confessing it." Then he turned to me and said, quickly: "You were quite right all through, and I was quite wrong. I learned this on my way home, and in London I verified it. A marriage contracted without previous asking by bans or permission by license, is entirely illegal and invalid, except in a simply religious sense; but, as long as church and state hold together, this sense will not suffice for the ordinary requirements of life. You are as free as if the marriage-service had never been said."

Then he went on in a low voice to the abbé:

"In a few days you will receive a properly-attested statement to this effect."

He stopped, but he did not look at me. I knew I ought to say something, but I could not tell what. If the abbé had not been there, perhaps some words would have come to me, but, in a few moments, I rejoiced that I had kept silence. I felt that the abbé's presence had been a safeguard.

"Then, monsieur, a second marriage would be necessary, if you wished to be Miss Stewart's husband?" said the abbé, earnestly.

I did not look up at once. I felt that the answer to this would be my fate. A sudden thought came that Madame La Peyre had been telling her suspicion to the abbé. I stiffened myself against any betrayal of feeling, and then I looked at Captain Brand; his eyes were fixed on my face; but I tried to appear quite unmoved. He turned to the abbé.

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"Certainly, monsieur, it would have been necessary. I only wish I had known this fact two years ago. I could then have set Miss Stewart altogether, as well as virtually, free. I cannot say how sorry I am that this trouble has been laid on her. She has much to forgive." Then he looked at me, and I felt confused and giddy. "If you really forgive me," he said, gently, "you will let me act as your guardian as long as you require one; and you will let me help in settling your future plans. Do you wish to go back to Tasmania?"

Every word fell on my heart like ice, telling me that his love was ended. It all went on so rapidly, that I seemed only glad to think it must soon be over, only careful, not by word or look, to grieve Captain Brand; for it seemed to me that now any betrayal of my changed feeling must pain him as much as my former coldness. He pitied me; but, with all this taking of blame to himself, he had not forgotten my misconduct, and the gulf that it had made between us was always present to him. And yet, humbled as I was by this consciousness—longing to atone, in some way, for the past—all my nature rose in protest against the slightest self-betrayal. I felt ready to die rather than to let him guess I was ready to be his wife. I shrank, too, from accepting his generosity.

I kept silent so long, that the abbé repeated the question. It was easier to answer him.

"You do not wish me to go, *mon père?*" I looked up at him. "Ah, no! I am sure you do not. I hope I am not unnatural, but it seems best to say really what I feel; and I believe I can lead a more useful and happy life here than I can in Tasmania"—I could not say that I knew I should be looked on at home as an unwelcome incumbrance—"but I cannot bear to feel that I am dependent on any one."

I got so red and confused that I stopped, and Captain Brand would, I believe, have interrupted me, even if I had gone on speaking.

"Pardon me, you cannot be dependent on any one but your guardian till you are twenty-one," he said, in that helpful, cheerful voice which made me long once more to be the child he had brought to Château-Fontaine two years and a half ago. How fearless I was then! I had nothing to be ashamed of. He went on gravely: "I gave a solemn promise to your mother to undertake your sole guardianship till that time, and nothing can release me. You have no will in the matter, for your father, the only person who has a right to interfere, has ratified the arrangement. Will you"—his voice was so sweet and winning now—"permit me to write to Mr. Stewart and explain all this matter for you? I promise you that no blame shall fall on you; and, indeed, this is not possible. I suppose"—he turned a smiling face to the abbé—"that any Englishman but a thick-skulled sailor would have known the fact of such a marriage being illegal. I rather wonder it has not occurred to Mr. Stewart."

The abbé seemed serious and disturbed. He only bowed to the captain, but he looked very lovingly at me as he spoke.

"You had better do as Monsieur le Capitaine wishes in every respect, my dear child," he said; "in obeying him, remember you obey your parents."

I longed to protest, but it was impossible; I could not get courage. Checked as I felt by Captain Brand's calm ease of manner, how could I say that my mother would not have allowed me to be dependent on a man who was not my husband?

"Then we will shake hands on the matter," he said, "and consider it settled that you continue at Château-Fontaine."

"You are very good"—he was holding my hand, and I got courage to look in his face for a moment, and again his sunken eyes and wearied face stirred my heart—"but it does not seem right."

"I believe you cannot refuse my guardianship"—he smiled, and I thought his face beautiful as it lit up from eyes and lips with a glow of affectionate kindness—"and I hope you will not refuse me your friendship. I cannot hope to rival your friends here in your regard"—he looked at the abbé—"but I care very much not to be quite forgotten even if we never meet again."

My heart beat so fast that I could hardly speak; if the abbé would only have gone away, perhaps I should have been able to say what I thought of Captain Brand's goodness.

"It is not likely I can forget you," I said, in a hard, forced voice, which did not seem to be my own, "and I hope you will come again."

At this he let go of my hand and turned quite away. I did not know whether he was displeased or disappointed, but I felt that the interview was over.

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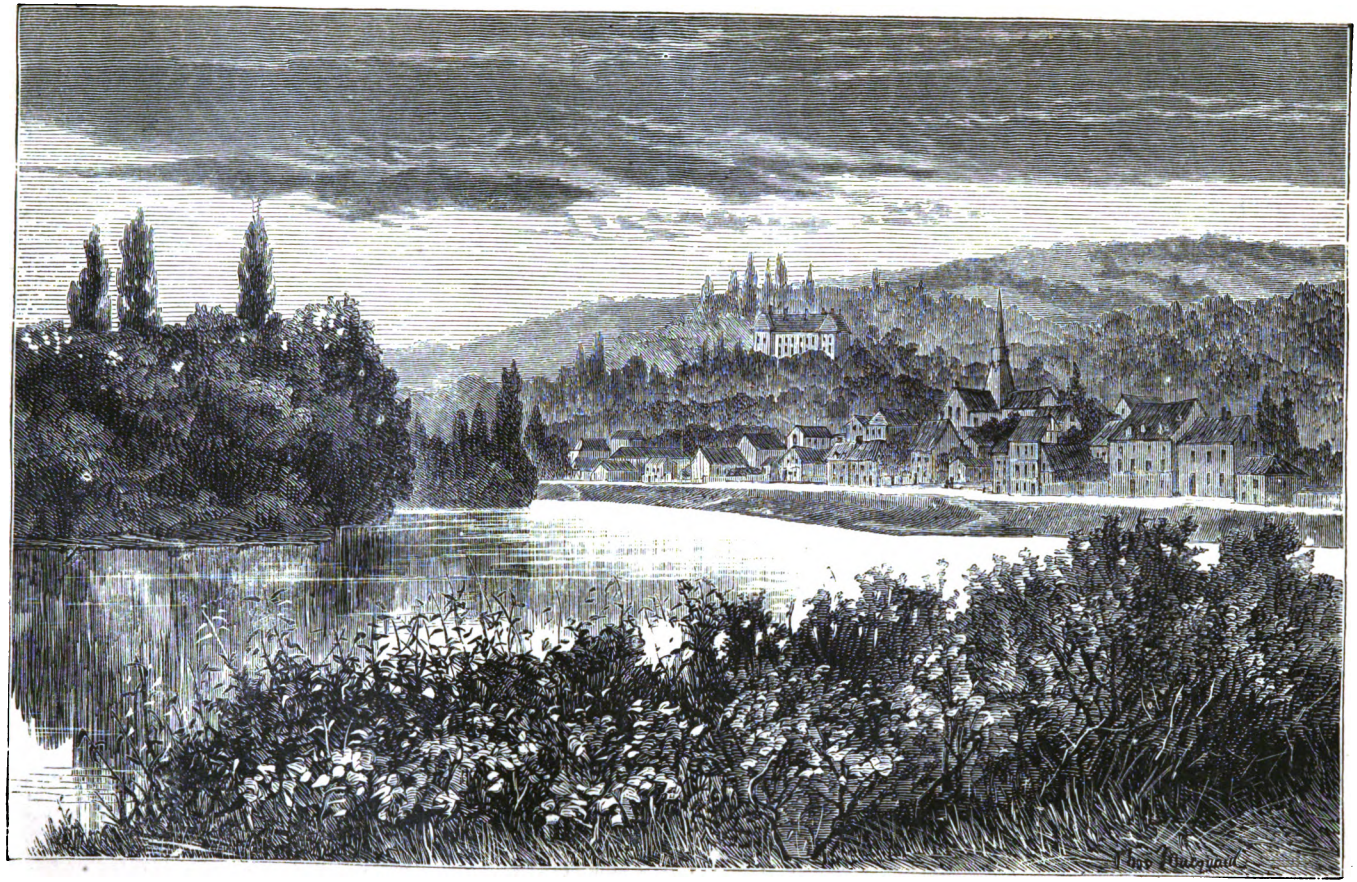

CHATEAU-FONTAINE.

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I looked at the abbé, and he evidently understood me; he came forward and opened the door.

"We will join you at breakfast very soon," he said, "and we must keep Monsieur le Capitaine a prisoner among us."

"Yes, yes." I was able to smile cheerfully as I passed out of the study.

CHAPTER LVII.

HEART-SICKNESS.

I HURRIED to my own room full of misery and self-reproach; but, when I opened the door, there was Madame La Peyre waiting for me.

"Pardon, my dear child;" and then, having guessed the state of my mind, while she seemed only occupied in giving me two soft kisses, she said: "I am so anxious to hear how Monsieur le Capitaine is looking, my Gertrude."

I put both hands on her shoulders, and looked fixedly into her sweet, dark eyes. It was necessary that she should know the truth at once, no matter what pain it gave to tell it.

"He looks sadly altered and very old," I said, quietly, "and he is very much troubled at his own mistake. That marriage on board the Adelaide was not a marriage at all, because there was no legal permission for it, and in England this is necessary."

Madame La Peyre looked puzzled and curious. "There is no more to tell?" she said, almost beseechingly.

"No more." I kissed her, for I wanted to hide my face. I could not keep the tears from my eyes. "I am to stay with you until I am so naughty that you will not keep me, and Captain Brand is to be my guardian till I am twenty-one; that is quite all, except that you will have to persuade him to stay, for he says he is going on to Paris to-night."

But Madame La Peyre had recovered herself. She drew away from me, so that I could no longer hide my eyes on her shoulder.

"Gertrude, I cannot ask him until I know whether you wish him to stay."

"I"—what can I say? I have no answer ready; my heart is ready to burst with restrained feeling. "Will you laugh at me, madame? I cannot tell you—by breakfast-time I will have made up my mind."

"*Bien;*" but she lingers till she sees I am hardened against further confidence, and then she leaves me alone.

Do I want Captain Brand to stop? I do not know. It is torture to be with him, and to feel that once, as he told me, he loved me with all his heart, and that now he—well, he pities me, and is willing to be my guardian. It will be torture when he goes. Will he ever come back? What does he care for Château-Fontaine, or for me either? And why do I care to think of him so much?

Yes—yes, I know it now. I can hardly write it down; but it has come to me this morning with a power that terrifies me with its vehemence, which I know is real, for it quivers in every fibre of my body, that—well, that I shall never be happy again unless he cares for me as he did once.

But this is mere folly, for he will never think of me in the same way again; what did he say to the abbé?—said it calmly and easily, too. Why should I torture myself with his presence? Is it quite too late? If I tried to make him see I care for him, would he not forget the past? I feel as if I must blot those words out. What! despised already for my want of truth, I could stoop to seek love where I am completely unsought! and, besides, I do not know whether this feverish wish to be with him is love. I believe it is only the unsatisfied longing I have to confess all my faults to him, and to be really forgiven; to be, in his opinion, as he told me I was before that terrible meeting in the wood. He forgives me now out of his unbounded generosity; but I should like to tell him every thing myself; my foolish fancy for the Count de Vaucresson, about Mr. Donald, and all that happened at Merdon, and then hear him say, "I forgive you." He may have given up all wish to make me his wife, but could he help loving me one little bit if I could get courage just once to show him what I think of his goodness and nobleness? I think of no one else—he is my hero; I am quite sure I shall never marry, because there is no room in my heart for love—it is filled with Captain Brand.

If he goes away at once, I think, I hardly know why, but I think he will never come back. If he stays a few days, I may get the chance of speaking to him. But shall I ever get courage? No, it is a new, strange kind of timidity I now have with Captain Brand;

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but it masters me, and I do not think it is likely to diminish. Well, I have got no answer for Madame La Peyre, and there is no use in seeking one; if Captain Brand and the abbé are at breakfast, madame cannot ask questions.

As I open the door of the *salle*, I hear that they are all assembled.

"He has been traveling in the East," the abbé says.

Captain Brand sits with his back to the door, and he does not know how near I am.

"Then he has not been here lately?"

"Not for a year," the abbé says; and the pause that follows my appearance tells me that they have been speaking of Eugène de Vaucresson.

I take my place and try to eat some breakfast, but I am ill at ease. A strange, self-conscious timidity besets me; I keep on wondering if Captain Brand is looking at me, and, when he is silent, I wonder what he is thinking of.

"Thou must take Monsieur le Capitaine to see Berthe," Madame La Peyre says, when breakfast is at last ended; and then she tells the history of my *protégée*.

"I shall like to go, very much," he answers; "and you will come, too, madame, will you not?"

I wonder why I am wounded that he is so evidently indifferent to me. If my timidity is as real as I think it, surely I cannot wish to find myself alone with Captain Brand. No, I do not wish this; but it is hard to feel that I am no more to him than Madame La Peyre is, perhaps not so much. I am not sure, if she had proposed to take a walk with him, that he would have asked me to be of the party.

I used to think all that I read in books about the contradiction in a woman's nature was foolish, but I think differently now. When Eugène said he loved me, I shrank from him more and more; as long as Captain Brand seemed to care for me, I almost disliked him; and yet, now, I feel that I should like Monsieur de Vaucresson to come just for five minutes, that Captain Brand might see which I really like. Ah, he should not be left one minute in doubt. I knew that Eugène was in the East; the abbé told me so; but I had not heard of his return.

To-night, as I write down the day's doings, I feel so listless and wearied that I almost resolve to give up the habit; if to-morrow is as full of disappointment as to-day has been, why should I set down the weary details? I can just put: "So much heart-ache, so much hope, so much of struggling with shyness, so many, oh, so many tears, I can feel them clinging round my heart and stifling me with the dull weight they have brought there." I can write this down, but not the pain of every hour.

We went to see Berthe, and she was shy and would not speak, and then we went to the church; Captain Brand had never seen it, and he greatly admired it; and then Monsieur le Curé took possession of him, and Madame La Peyre and I walked back alone.

"The captain is going to stay," she said.

I did not answer, and she left me in peace. She went on talking about Margôt, the curé's house-keeper, and some embroidery cotton she had asked for.

By the time dinner was over, my head ached so badly that even the abbé noticed how pale I was, and Madame La Peyre rang for Angélique, and handed me into her charge to be put to bed, just as if I were still ill. The only nice thing that has happened is, that when I said "Good-night," Captain Brand held my hand an instant, and looked at me very earnestly.

"I am afraid you are still ill."

His voice was so kind that tears came into my eyes; as I did not want him to think me foolish, I did not look up; I only said, "I shall be better to-morrow, thank you," and I went off with that dear, discreet Angélique, who brushed my hair quietly without even seeming to notice the tears that kept on rolling down my cheeks.

CHAPTER LVIII.

"AU COIN DU FEU."

THE abbé has dragged Captain Brand off to see the ruins of St.-Wandrille, a few miles away. It appears that I am not considered strong enough for so long an expedition. They will probably dine in Caudebec, and not be home till evening. On the whole, I believe it is a relief. There was a decided constraint in Captain Brand's manner toward me this morning—a complete absence of that frank, brotherly manner which he had at first.

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I must have offended him yesterday, but I do not know what I have done. I will ask Madame La Peyre; and yet, when I am alone with her, she so completely avoids the subject of Captain Brand, that I cannot find the opportunity I want. Something—I could not say in what it consists, it is scarcely more than a slight instinct—makes me shrink from giving this dear, sweet woman the slightest insight into the mental torture in which I am living; for I am tortured, and I see that it would have been better, much better for me, if Captain Brand had gone away yesterday. If he were really gone, and I knew there was no chance of his coming back, I think I should get over this self-conscious torment.

As the evening comes on, I get into a flutter of expectation. We have dined, and Madame La Peyre and I are together in the *salon*. The days are lengthening out, but we are always glad of a fire at Château-Fontaine, except in July and the first days of August. We are sitting beside the fire; the candles in the sconces against the wall have not been lighted. I think Madame La Peyre is asleep, and I go on thinking of Captain Brand.

He has been here two days, and how little he has spoken of his adventures! If I questioned him, would he talk more of himself? I cannot tell how it is, but I feel a sort of false shame in speaking to him before the abbé and Madame La Peyre. I have scarcely volunteered a direct question; and, as I seem to get more and more timid, I suppose this state of things must continue, and that he will go away convinced that, though I no longer dislike him actively, still he is perfectly indifferent to me. Well, and I have come to the beginning of my circle again—why do I wish any thing else? He plainly feels no special interest in me, only his natural kindness and generosity make him take a pleasure in fulfilling his promise to my mother.

"Gertrude!"—Madame La Peyre's voice startles me, I thought she was sound asleep—"why dost thou sigh so heavily, dearest child, and why dost thou so often look at the clock?"

I pushed my chair still farther into the corner, shadowed by the projecting fireplace.

"I hardly know why I sighed. I fancy a sigh is the result of one's mood, rather than of any special thought. Don't you think that, when one is tired or sleepy, one is quite as apt to sigh as when one is sentimental? I was thinking that the abbé is very late."

For answer, I heard a deep sigh.

"Gertrude," she said, presently, "thou art greatly changed. I do not think thou wouldst suffer petulance to stand between thee and happiness, and yet I am puzzled. It has seemed to me in all these months of suspense that thou mightest be gay and bright again if only Captain Brand were restored to us; and yet he is here, and I cannot see that thou art happy. What is it, my child?"

I longed to trust her fully—to cross the slippery space of shining wood between us, and put my head on her shoulder, and ask her what this torment was which made me long so for Captain Brand's presence, and yet, when I was near him, made me so tongue-tied and uneasy; but, though I loved my sweet old friend dearly, I could not quite trust her. She might imagine all sorts of things, and she might take upon herself to speak to Captain Brand about my feelings.

"I am not used to him," I said, quietly; "and our last parting was so very uncomfortable that I fancy we must both feel a restraint when we remember it. Next time he comes I shall be far more at my ease."

"I only hope there is no mistake."—She sighed again.—"I confess that Monsieur le Capitaine puzzles me more than thou dost. I have an idea that even the wisest men do well to take counsel sometimes."

Has she been trying to discover Captain Brand's feelings, and has she been baffled?

Before I could ask a question, the noise of dogs and wheels announced our travelers, and they soon appeared in the *salon*.

The abbé was full of enthusiasm; he had not seen the ruins of St.-Wandrille for some years, and he launched out into elaborate descriptions of them. Captain Brand seemed tired; he had taken a chair beside me, and he appeared to find as much interest in the smouldering logs in the grate as I did.

"Do you ever make stories and pictures out of the fire?" I say, at last. I seem to have forgotten all my torture. For the first time since his arrival I feel at ease and happy beside him. He has not spoken one word, and yet some undefinable sympathy tells me that he shares with me this great happiness of silent companionship.

"No," he says; and, without looking up, I know that he is smiling. "I am not poetical enough; but I like to watch the sparks fly

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up the chimney—it puts me in mind of the time when I was a boy."

Then we are quiet again. It is like a rough awakening from sleep when Mathieu appears with candles, and Madame La Peyre says it is time to go to bed.

Reading my account to-night of these last days, it seems empty and monotonous—a mere record of getting up with a heavy heart and going to bed with the burden in no way lightened. I shall not write my journal again till I have really something better worth setting down.

CHAPTER LIX.

IN WHICH I SAY GOOD-BY TO CAPTAIN BRAND.

I HAVE kept my resolution. Two days have gone by, and I have not chronicled them, and now I can scarcely write down what has happened.

Yesterday began better. We all went to the mill, and, laughing and talking with Madame Roussel, somehow I seemed to get less shy. I actually showed Captain Brand the view of the Seine, and pointed out Le Trait, etc.; but, as we walked home, he left me of his own free-will to go and talk to Madame La Peyre. The abbé, seeing this desertion, came and walked beside me; but, instead of listening to him, I was trying to hear the talk of our companions walking just behind.

We drove to St.-Antoine, but Monsieur and Madame Dupont were out, and the talk was chiefly about the country through which we passed, and the various ruins within reach of Château-Fontaine.

"I should like to see some of these old castles and abbeys," I said.

"I wish I could have staid to bear you company," said Captain Brand.

"There is nothing more easy, my dear sir. We will all go together." I see that the abbé is on his hobby in the matter of ruins. "We will, if you please, go to Lillebonne to-morrow."

"You are very kind, but I must not indulge myself with a longer holiday; I purpose going on to Paris to-morrow morning."

I felt a kind of shock, but the abbé and Madame La Peyre both spoke at once.

"Ah, but it is not possible; this visit is so real a pleasure that Monsieur le Capitaine will not shorten it."

There were tears in madame's eyes as she entreated, and then she turned to me.

"Thou art disappointed that Monsieur le Capitaine goes away; is it not so, Gertrude?"

Captain Brand fixes his eyes on me with a very curious expression in them.

"I hoped you would have staid longer," I began, and then self-consciousness stopped my tongue, and there was an awkward silence.

"I believe"—Captain Brand smiled round at us, he was certainly quite self-possessed—"that I ought to have kept to my first intention; but life was so pleasant here that your kindness was hard to resist. I have so very much to arrange and settle still, that I must return to England. I left London in too much haste last week."

"But you will return to us," madame said, "when the business is ended?"

Captain Brand bowed.

"You are very good to me, madame. Yes, some day I hope to see Château-Fontaine again."

After all, I believe it is a relief that he is going away, only I wish I had been less cold and stiff. During the evening I try to speak and look pleasantly at Captain Brand. But he just answers me, that is all. At last I offer to sing, though I know what an effort this will be. But when I get to the piano, I only dare venture on one or two very ordinary songs of a lively kind, and he does not seem to care much for them. When I go back to my chair in the corner he does not come to sit beside me—he is bent on looking at some huge books which the abbé, with Mathieu's, help has dragged in from the library—engravings of abbeys, and churches, and castles of Normandy. They are to me profoundly uninteresting, for they are represented just as the artist has thought fit to draw them, not as they must look in Nature; they seem all got up for effect.

Madame La Peyre goes and looks over her brother's shoulder; and, presently, she calls me to share her admiration, but I find there is not room for more than three at a time, so I have to come back quietly to my chair in the corner. How long and weary this evening is! Is it the last I shall ever spend with Captain Brand?

"You will not start very early to-morrow?" Madame La Peyre says, beseechingly.

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"I thought of going about twelve," he answers.

During the night I determined to thank Captain Brand for all his kindness and goodness before he went away; but, just before I went down-stairs, I looked out of the window. It was a clear, bright morning, not so warm but almost as full of sunshine as that morning when we drove away from Château-Fontaine, and I felt as if I could only be happy away from Captain Brand and with the Count de Vaucresson. Why did that bitter, foolish mistake come back so strongly now? I think it was from the strange power that associations have on memory. Far off, near the gates—not in the avenue, but on the left, among the larches—I can make out the abbé talking with the captain. Unless he goes down to mass, the abbé does not go out so early. How very fond he must be of Captain Brand! I sometimes wonder how they understand one another; for the abbé's English is about as indifferent as Captain Brand's French is.

At breakfast he announces that business calls him to Paris, so they can start in company.

"It is a pleasant arrangement for me, is it not, madame?" the captain says; "but I have promised to go and say good-by to Monsieur le Curé.—So, monsieur, I will start first, and you will kindly pick me up."

"Then, monsieur, you will give us your company to the village, will you not?" says Madame La Peyre; "Gertrude and I are going there."

I had not heard of this visit to the village before, but I took no notice; I was glad; I saw in it a chance of saying what I wanted. When I come back from getting my hat, Captain Brand is standing alone in the hall. I hurry down-stairs. I will speak to him; there is just time.

"Captain Brand," I begin, and then I hear Madame La Peyre coming down-stairs, "I cannot let you go away without thanking you for all your generosity and kindness to me. I want to say, too, that"—I feel how stiff and hard my voice is, and I stop.

Captain Brand takes my hand in his, and says, so kindly, "Please don't say any thing; and please understand that nothing I do for you is kind or generous either—it is simple duty."

He lets go my hand as Madame La Peyre comes in sight; but I am sure she noticed something, she looks so inquisitive.

She begins to talk at once, and she and Captain Brand have the conversation to themselves. I go on thinking of his words. We are just opposite Mathieu's cottage, and Madame La Peyre says: "Ah, mon Dieu! I had forgotten; I must speak to Mathieu. Will you then, dear child, go on with Monsieur le Capitaine, and take this cotton to Margôt at the presbytère?"

Margôt is the house-keeper of Monsieur le Curé, and Madame La Peyre often makes her a present of some of the fine embroidery cotton she gets from Paris; but to-day this errand seems unreal and fortuitous, and I feel a strong conviction that Madame La Peyre is only arranging that the captain and I may be left together. I feel rebellious against any thing that seems arranged; but, after those words of his just now about duty, I am almost indifferent to any thing that may happen. He feels no pleasure, then, in any thing he does for me; it is all duty—only a duty. Madame La Peyre says good-by very sweetly to Captain Brand, and kisses her hand to him, as she disappears within one of the green doors of the cottage. Then we walk on a little way in silence.

"Well," he says, at last, for I leave him to break the silence, "many changes may happen before I come again; do you not think so?"

"I suppose that must depend very much on the length of your absence."

I dare say I do speak dryly, and I cannot help it; it is unnatural that I should care to see Captain Brand again, if he cares nothing for me—it is unwomanly, even.

"That may be quite beyond my own control," he says, gravely, "and I am not sure that circumstances depend on length of time. Sometimes a year may go by without any event worth speaking of—I mean in its effect on our individual lives—and then, in one week, sorrows, or joys, or both together, come so rapidly as almost to overwhelm us."

I thought of his mother's death, and I wondered how I could have forgotten it.

"Was your mother very old?" I said, softly.

"Yes, much older than you would expect. She married late in life. Her death was very sudden; even if I had been in England, I could not have been summoned in time."

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He walked on silently, and I did not like to speak, for I guessed he was thinking of his mother.

"What I meant just now," he began, abruptly, "was, that when next I come to Château-Fontaine, I may, perhaps, not find you here—you may be married;" he said the last words with an effort.

I felt stung and wounded through all the cold indifference I had assumed.

"I do not know why you should think so; I see no one here."

"That is just what I have been saying to Madame La Peyre; it must be dull—you will pardon my interference, will you not?—and she has promised to take you to Rouen. She has many friends in the neighborhood; and, in the winter, what do you think of a visit to Paris? You would like to see the theatres, and I fancy you will enjoy some balls."

"You are very kind; but I am quite content to stay at Château-Fontaine. I—I am quite happy." He is not content with hinting his indifference; he actually wishes me to find a husband, so that he may be rid of me. He seems to think me ungrateful, for he speaks coldly:

"You only know Château-Fontaine; wait till you have seen Paris. You have no idea how gay and bright it is."

"Should we be likely to see you in Paris?" I say, at last, and I am angry with myself for the interest with which I say it.

"Certainly—if I can be of any use to you there. I thought you would have felt this, Gertrude; I beg your pardon, but I mean that my duty is always to devote my time, or advice, or any thing that can be of use to you to your service."

Oh, how horribly cold and unsympathizing he is! it is cruel to be so unforgiving. Why cannot he say pleasure instead of duty? ah! he would, if he felt it.

"Then," I said, "supposing—I only say supposing, it seems to me so very unlikely—but if I were going to be married you would give your advice if I asked it?"

I forced myself to look up at him. I must let him see that, though I am respectful and grateful, I am as indifferent as he is.

He gave me one searching look, but I did not flinch, I felt sure he could not read any thing in my face; and then he looked away.

"Well," he said, presently, with an uneasy laugh, "I fancy that is just the one thing on which a woman never follows advice, even if she seeks it; she has generally chosen before she knows it herself."

"Do you think so?" I forget every thing but the interest of at last hearing my own feelings spoken by another person?

"Well, is it not the truth that a woman seldom knows that she loves till her eyes are opened to the fact by another person?"

"You mean then that if a woman loves—no matter how unworthy the person—she will refuse to take advice against her love?"

Captain Brand looked at me so earnestly that I felt timid and confused; it seemed as if he was going to say something, and checked himself. He laughed this time much more easily.

"I suppose I really mean that I would rather not be consulted on such a subject, but I certainly hope you will honor me by telling me when your choice is made."

"Certainly, if you wish it." I feel so wounded that tears come into my eyes, but I try to be as cool as he is. "I hope you will do the same, but perhaps your marriage is already settled?"

I could not look at him; my heart beat so fast till his answer came that I felt stifled.

"I—I beg your pardon; I have not thought of it." Then his troubled tone changed to the easy, playful voice which so vexes me: "Well, perhaps I may marry some day, when I am older and wiser; it is possible, of course."

We had not reached the presbytère, but I saw Margôt gossiping at a neighbor's door, and the captain saw her too.

"I must not drag you any farther downhill," he said, "it is so steep to mount alone. Well, it is hard to say good-by; God bless you, my dear child; you will let me call you that till you are married, will you not?"

He had got both my hands in his, and I looked up—ah! at the tenderness in his eyes all my pride melted; I forgot in my folly that it was only his brotherly pity.

"I shall never marry," I said; "please don't think so. Good-by."

And, in the terror that seized me, I drew my hands quickly away, and hurried off to Margôt and her circle of gossips.

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CHAPTER LX.

AT LAST.

It is only a week since he went away, and it seems more like a month. I wonder how I could say that I was content to live always at Château-Fontaine? My eyes seem to have opened to its dullness. I believe I am growing wicked, for I feel a want even in Madame La Peyre and Angélique, and Berthe's mistakes make me horribly cross. I am only happy when I am alone, free to dream of Captain Brand.

I suppose I show my discontent, for to-day I saw Angélique look in her deprecating way at Madame La Peyre when I found fault with the cake at dessert.

When we were left alone, my sweet old friend said:

"We will go and see my cousin at Dieppedale, Gertrude, as soon as my brother comes back; he is delayed at present by some business of Monsieur de Vaucresson; he had to go to Paris to meet him."

I had guessed this previously.

"Does the count live in Paris?"

"He is there for a short time, but he has been traveling almost ever since his mother died. Probably he will now lead a little more settled life. I hope it will not vex thee, dear child, but Monsieur Vaucresson has declared his intention of visiting Château-Fontaine. The abbé will do all in his power to dissuade him; but he has written to me to prepare thee, as Monsieur de Vaucresson says he must come; he has something special to say to thee."

"I cannot see him unless you are with me."

"Without doubt I will be with thee; but my brother seems to think that, as this young man is determined, it is better that thou shouldst see him in a formal manner, or he may vex thee by meeting thee unexpectedly."

"Yes, oh yes, I think so, too. I should much dislike that," and I shrank with something very like disgust from the remembrance of that last meeting in the carriage; Madame La Peyre does not speak any more of Eugène, and I try, instead, to think of staying at Dieppedale and Rouen. I suppose I owe this change in my life to Captain Brand. I do not care how much I owe him now, my pride seems dead. When I think of that look in his eyes, I know that he still cares for me. He does not love me, perhaps, in the way he did once; but he thinks of me as if I were a dear little sister. When I sit alone and think of him, I am very, very happy; it is only the looking forward to weeks, and months, and years, when I shall perhaps never see him again, that makes life seem so weary.

If I could live in a dream of him, I could always be happy; and yet, somehow, I am not content with myself. Madame La Peyre and Angélique are as kind and good as ever, but I tire of them; and poor Berthe is really not more stupid; it is I who am less patient. Yes, I am glad to go away; it will make a break, and I can begin life again when we come back.

"I hope we shall have fine weather," I say to madame, "or we shall not see much of Rouen."

"But it is certain to be fine, my child"—I do not think I ever heard Madame La Peyre anticipate evil—"it has rained for four days."

It seemed as if her words were to come true. Next morning there was not only a clear sky and sunshine, but there was that balmy sweetness in the air which tells that all is new, and fresh, and young, the very breath of spring.

I was therefore surprised at my dear friend's troubled face, when we met at breakfast.

"Thou wilt probably receive the visit I spoke of to-day, my child, so we will stay in this morning."

She spoke with so much constraint that I did not like to question her. It seemed to me that, if I told Monsieur de Vaucresson decidedly in her presence that I did not wish to see him, he could not in common courtesy repeat his visit.

I felt as I remember feeling when I was told, as a child, that the dentist was coming to look at my teeth—a feeling of dislike and also of resentment—and I wished the morning was over. I could not help comparing my feelings with those of hardly more than a week ago, when we were expecting Captain Brand's arrival. I had no nervous flutter to-day, only the shrinking of intense dislike.

As I could not pay my usual visit to Berthe, I went to the study. I had promised to set the abbé's books in order for him, and I had put off this task day after day, because

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doing it would disturb my long, delicious reveries.

"I used to delight in doing any thing for the abbé," I thought, with self-reproach, and I tried to set diligently to work.

I was in the middle of a shelf of heavy, dusty brown volumes, with Latin names on the backs, when a tap came at the door. It was Madame La Peyre.

"Gertrude," she looked very timid, "if the count should present himself to me, and ask thee in marriage, what—what answer am I to make?"

"O madame, how can you ask such a question? I have told you I shall never marry; besides, he will not ask me."

"Thou hast said so, but then thou wast not free. All is changed now."

"I can never change. I can never give any other answer," I said, decidedly.

She sighed, but she went away at once, and I felt ashamed of my vehemence.

I had gone on with my work for about an hour, and then came another tap. This time it was Angélique.

"Mademoiselle," she said, gravely, "madame is engaged in the *salon* with Monsieur le Comte de Vaucresson, and she will be glad if mademoiselle will join her; but"—Angélique's formal manner vanished as she looked at me—"what has mademoiselle been doing? her hair is rough, and her dress is powdered with dust; ah, but she is quite spoiled."

"Come and put me to rights, then," I said, very glad of a few minutes' reprieve.

Angélique evidently considered the interview very important; she made my hair as smooth as possible, and persuaded me to put on a pretty new *batiste* dress which she had just made for me. Then she went on before me to the door of the *salon*, glancing over her shoulder to see that I was all right.

I made a deep courtesy to Monsieur de Vaucresson as I entered. He looked much older and more serious than when I last saw him.

Madame La Peyre turned at once to speak to me, but he interrupted:

"Pardon, madame; you will at least permit me to speak for myself.—Mademoiselle"—his voice had a soft, pleading tone that might, perhaps, once have moved me—"forgive me for intruding myself on you. I have much, indeed, to ask forgiveness for, but we were both the victims of a mistake. Now that you are free, and that time has proved to you the power and strength of my devotion, will you not listen to me—will you not become my wife?"

I had not given any weight to Madame La Peyre's judgment, and I felt taken by surprise. All the resentment I had summoned up against this intrusion was disarmed, and yet I did not feel one bit less of the shrinking I had for Eugène.

But I answered as gently as I could.

"Monsieur," I said, "I thank you for the honor you have done me; but I do not wish to marry."

"That is impossible." His eyes sparkled, and he spoke very fast.—"Madame, you will join with me in telling mademoiselle that it is unheard of that she should remain unmarried. —You are surprised now"—he spoke to me—"I have been too sudden. When you have reflected, you will give me a different answer." Then he bent forward, and said, in a low voice, "Ah, Gertrude, do not be unforgiving to one who loves you dearly."

I had never thought of any thing like this. I looked at Madame La Peyre, but she put her handkerchief to her eyes, and seemed quite touched by the count's appeal.

I could only think of Captain Brand, and wish he were there, and tell me what to do.

"Monsieur," I said, at last, "I am very sorry, but I cannot marry unless I love; and, therefore, I must remain unmarried."

He frowned slightly.

"I am not afraid," he said, "if you will be my wife: that is all I ask for, the rest will follow."

"I cannot—indeed, I cannot! I do not wish to offend you, but that is the only answer I can give."

"Pardon." He came forward and placed himself beside me, and then he whispered: "Why will you not forgive me, my beloved? I know you love me, but your dignity requires my humiliation. Must I then kneel to you?" He bent one knee, and his face was full of sadness.

I looked reproachfully at Madame La Peyre—I thought she ought to help me. "Madame, you know my feeling; as I cannot convince the Comte de Vaucresson, will you tell him that you know I am quite in earnest?"

Madame sighed. I began to see that she thought I was hard.

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The count had risen, but he stood close to me.

"Monsieur"—I tried to speak soothingly—"I believe you are in earnest, and, therefore, I am the more bound to be in earnest also. If I could love you I would; but this is not in my power, and, therefore, it is better that we should not meet again.—Good-by," and I held out my hand; "I shall always think of you as a friend."

He kissed my hand, and then made me a profound bow; but he did not attempt to prevent my departure; he even came forward and held open the door for me.

Poor Eugène! When I reached my room I could not help crying; it did seem very hard that I should have changed so much. Why is it, when he loves me—why cannot I love him in return? And yet, perhaps, I have not changed. I do not think I ever loved him. I never sat and dreamed of him himself, only of being with him, and of the amusement he gave me. When did this change in my feelings come?

I feel a warm tide rushing up even to my forehead, and my face sinks, glad to hide between my hands. There is no use in questioning myself. I know what I have been fearing and doubting about too long—that, from the day Captain Brand left me at the foot of the ivy-stump, he has been the only man I cared to think of, and Eugène has been only a boy.

I was still in this confusion, half sad, half delicious, when Madame La Peyre came asking for admission.

As she kissed me, I said:

"You were very naughty just now not to interfere."

"Ah, my child, but thou art cruel; the poor Eugène he so loves thee, and I should like to see my Gertrude a countess."

"Is that it? But you care more that I should be happy?"

"Yes, it is true," she sighed; "but the poor fellow has gone away broken-hearted."

"I am glad he is gone—it is much better; but indeed he will soon find some one more fitted to be his wife."

She still looked sorrowful, and she shook her head. "Come, let us go and see Berthe; we have been shut up all day."

I felt more grieved that I had disappointed Madame La Peyre than about Eugène; somehow I could not believe in the reality of his love. She was unusually silent till we reached the cottage, and then we both burst out laughing.

Mathieu had been painting the doors a brilliant green, and I suppose had left his paint-pot and brush on the ground outside.

Berthe had evidently been seized with a desire for extra usefulness. There she stood on the grass before the cottage, her right hand brandishing the paint-brush, while with her left she held Mathieu's walnut-wood arm-chair—now, alas! a brilliant green. But she had also painted her face with splashes, her hair, her gown—her *sabots* even had not escaped the universal tint, and, as she turned round to face us with the uplifted brush, I expected we should get painted too.

"V'là, ma'm'selle!" She pointed to the chair with a grin of triumphant delight. "Aha, it is Mathieu who will be pleased. Mathieu has gone to Caudebec, and when he comes back he will think it is a new chair that Berthe has got for him."

"Berthe, but he will not be able to sit in the chair; the paint will be quite wet."

Berthe gazed wistfully first at me and then at the chair, and then plunged her painted fingers in among her hair, her usual resource when puzzled.

"Does ma'm'selle think then that it will not be dry by evening?" She stood staring with her mouth wide open; evidently some sudden and fresh puzzle had presented itself. "*Mon Dieu!*" she burst out crying, "what, then, will Mathieu have to sit on when he comes in and he is tired? Berthe has painted all the chairs."

We tried not to laugh, for her distress increased to sobs.

Madame La Peyre comforted her a little by telling her she would send down two old chairs.

"But you must never paint again, Berthe," she said, "unless under Mathieu's orders, and you had better change your clothes before he comes home, and get the paint off your hands and face."

Berthe looked ruefully at the unfinished arm-chair; but, with her usual dog-like obedience, she put down the paint-brush and went into the cottage.

"There is an end of Berthe for to-day," I said. "Now, what shall we do?—Madame,

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you have always promised to trust yourself to my rowing; will you come now?"

I did not feel inclined to talk; I was just in a mood for the slow movement of a boat through the water.

Madame La Peyre drew her shawl round her, and gave a little shiver.

"I will wait a little, my dear child, till the sun has more power. After four days of rain I fear the boat will be damp; too damp for thee even, Gertrude."

"Oh, no. I am so out of practice that a good, hard row will save me from taking cold; but I will not stay long—*au revoir*."

I was really glad to be alone. I scarcely know what had put the boat in my head unless it was the hope that Madame La Peyre would not talk to me while I rowed. I had only visited the wood on the other side of the stream once since I met Captain Brand there, and then I had felt so full of shame and misery that I resolved not to go there again.

But since this I had gone through a complete change of feeling. Whenever I recalled the last look I had seen in his eyes it seemed to me that I was entirely forgiven. And it was shorter and pleasanter to cross the river behind Mathieu's cottage and find my way to the bridge through the wood than to climb up to the château again and descend through the nut-wood, there being no paths along this bank of the stream.

I came through the wood very slowly, thinking now of Captain Brand, now of this morning's interview. I felt timid as I drew near the ivy-stump, for it was so directly in the path that I knew I must pass it, and it was still full of painful remembrance; but, just before it came in sight, I saw some one coming toward me through the wood. The leaves were still scanty on the trees, so that I was scarcely a moment in doubt. It was Monsieur de Vaucresson. I stopped short, and looked behind me; there was no one in sight, and, if I turned back, the count could overtake me in an instant.

"I knew you would come," he said. "Pardon me, but I have been waiting."

He smiled, and looked quite happy.

"I am sorry you have waited," I said, gravely; "I did not come to meet you."

"My charming Gertrude," he said, "why will you keep up this farce? You have done enough for prudery to-day. Be kind, be as you were when you first came to Château-Fontaine, when my love was all you desired."

"You are mistaken, monsieur"—he tried to take my hand, but I drew back proudly—"I—I did not know what love was then. I mistook gratified vanity for it; I know the difference now."

I felt I was growing crimson as he stared at me, and I stopped.

"You know the difference now!" he said, passionately. "*Mon Dieu!* what is this I hear? Why did you not say this to-day? Who has taught you this difference? I insist—I will know."

All my courage had fled, now I had come to the brink. I felt that I could not trust this man. I could not put it in his power to say I had even confessed to myself my love for a man who did not love me. He muttered something I did not understand.

"We are doomed to interruptions," he said; "there is some one on the bridge."

I turned in a kind of ecstasy. I felt capable of hugging even deaf Baptiste in my joy at a chance of escape.

On the bridge there was—I could hardly believe it, it seemed as if my eyes must be playing me a trick—but, actually, there stood Captain Brand, not coming toward us, but gazing as if he had just perceived us, and hesitated to advance. I forgot every thing but my longing for protection, and I beckoned to him. How quickly he came! It seemed as if he cleared the space between us by magic. I shrank to his side at once, and put my hand in his. Even in that moment of excitement I noticed that no greetings passed between any of us.

"Monsieur," the count said, haughtily, "is perhaps still the guardian of this young lady?"

"I have that honor"—I felt that Captain Brand clasped my hand tightly in his—"and, therefore, I may perhaps ask your reason for appealing to me."

Monsieur de Vaucresson threw his head back, I thought arrogantly.

"Monsieur, I have to-day asked Miss Stewart to be my wife, and she has refused. I have again this moment asked her, and I have demanded a reason for this refusal; for, as you yourself saw, Miss Stewart loved me well enough when we first met at Château-Fontaine."

The grasp on my hand had grown almost

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painful, and I could hear a deep, low breathing, that sounded like suppressed anger.

"I saw that you admired Miss Stewart, that was all," said Captain Brand.

"It is false!" I did not think Eugène's eyes could flash so angrily. "She loved me; she always spoke of you with contempt; and now she says that she loves some one else. *Ah, mon Dieu!* Monsieur, I tell you, as her guardian, I have a right to know who is this some one else before I leave Château-Fontaine."

I felt the grasp slacken, then loose hold, and I nearly fell to the ground. But Captain Brand was not looking at me; he had come forward so as to place himself between me and the count; his eyes were fixed on Eugène de Vaucresson.

"Monsieur," he said, "I pass over your violent language; I am quite sure Miss Stewart has given you a fair answer, and it is not right or like a man to press your suit on her in this way. She is incapable of coquetry; if there were any hope for you she would give it. — You would, would you not, my dear?"

There was a secret pain in his voice which seemed to take away my senses. I hardly know what Eugène said next, but all at once I heard the words:

"She is utterly false, monsieur. Free from coquetry — bah! She loves some stranger; she owns it."

"Silence, sir!"—very sternly—then Captain Brand's voice came, in such deep sadness that my heart seemed almost to break as it listened:

"What is this, Gertrude? It is false, is it not? Say so, quickly."

But the count would not wait for my answer.

"Monsieur, I swear to you, on the honor of a gentleman, and I think," he said, with a sneer of passionate scorn, "that that is better worth than the word of a woman, that only just now she said some one had taught her what love was. Can you deny it?" He looked at me with such fierce anger, that my courage came back.

"I said to you, monsieur"—I gave one little, imploring look at Captain Brand, but he did not take my hand in his—"that I had mistaken the vanity you gratified for love."

"And after—what did you say after?"

"After!"—I was stung out of all self-control, my one thought was to refute this slander, and regain Captain Brand's confidence—"I said I had learned the difference; but I never said a *stranger* had taught me;" and then I covered up my face with my hands.

I felt a strong arm round me; I heard the words said, calmly and politely:

"Monsieur, you are answered, and I am satisfied;" and then I heard the sound of a muttered curse, and the tread of retreating footsteps.

The strong arm wound itself closely round me.

"My own darling at last," he said.

I am not going to describe the moments that came after; I do not think I could describe them. Perfect happiness, like perfect beauty, mocks words and defies analysis; and I cherish the belief that no one was ever so happy as we were then. I say no one advisedly, for how it came about I know not. I only know that it has been impossible to think of ourselves since those precious moments as two persons.

He would stop at the ivy-covered stump on our way to the bridge, and ask my forgiveness for all the cruel words which he said he had there uttered.

"Come," he said, at last, "let me row you in this boat—I shall be jealous if you say 'No.'"

But I thought of Madame La Peyre and of Angélique; it seemed as if they ought at once to know my happiness, and I said so.

"It shall be as you like," he said, "I cannot contradict you in any thing to-day; afterward I may turn out such a tyrant that you will perhaps repent your choice, but" — he went on, laughing—"I believe your dear old friend guesses. As I came up the avenue I saw her, and asked for you. She said you had gone to find the boat. 'Why do you want Gertrude, monsieur?' she said."

"And did you tell her?"

"I told her what I have been trying to force myself to believe ever since I went away, that there was a possible hope even for a rough, weather-beaten fellow like me, and that it was better to risk a refusal than to yield up tamely all the happiness of my life. And yet, Gertrude, when I saw you first in the wood all my hope faded, and I thought myself a conceited fool."

"Did you?" I seem to have lost my

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power of looking saucy; every time I steal a glance up at him I feel happier.

"You do not ask what Madame La Peyre said, miss," he went on, after a while; "she said: 'Have no fear, my friend; if you had not come, I should have written this afternoon to tell my brother, the abbé, to seek you. Now, do not ask questions, but go quickly and find Gertrude; you must meet her if you cross the rustic bridge.'"

"She was going to write you, *par example!* I fancied you had had enough of taking me from any one but myself. Oh, I must punish her for such an audacious thought," and I darted off up the nut-wood.

He overtook me in an instant.

"You tried that once before," he said, "at Merdon, and I advise you to let it alone in future."

And certainly he gave me no chance of escape till we came in sight of the château.

"I believe I am sorry after all. I see you have not cured yourself at all of the masterful ways you had at sea; you have been acting sweetness and gentleness like a perfect hypocrite."

"Well"—when that smile spreads over his face it becomes beautiful—"I don't know what to say about hypocrisy; what has become of the silent, languid, formal, young lady I found here only a week ago? when but for little glints of sunshine that sparkled out against her will here and there I should have been frozen to death?"

"Then why did you come back to such a disagreeable person?"

As I look up and see the deep, unspeakable tenderness in his face, a loving reverence steals over me, and I go back gladly into silence.

"To tell you that I should have to go back a long way, my darling. Did you think that such a love as mine is for you could be stamped out, as I own I once tried to stamp it out of my heart? Why, ever since I left you crouching under that tree, I have told myself I was a hard-hearted brute. I have had no peace. I believe my best excuse was, that I had hoped so desperately to win you by giving up all the rights I thought I possessed, that I had gone through a good deal of torture which you never suspected each time I came to Merdon. When I met you again here, you looked so—ah, my darling, you don't know how I felt when I saw you, and then to find out that—well, I was very hard, and very cruel; and I hope I shall never forget it."

He broke off, but I could have listened forever. This strange new eloquence was the greatest joy I had had even in this happy morning; it seemed to be giving me the key of his heart—that heart I longed so to understand.

"Please go on, I love to hear all this," I whispered; and I leaned more heavily on his arm.

He went on again, presently:

"All the time we were in the ice I felt a keen remorse. I had left you in anger, without even trying to ascertain if there was any possibility of getting the marriage set aside; and there I was penned up, and perhaps should never see England again. But it was still worse as we came home. One of our fellow-passengers was an English barrister; and, in general conversation, the question came up accidentally about sudden marriages. I put to him a case like ours; he said, 'That would be no marriage,' and he gave the reason. The shock took away all my strength, and I was on the sick-list for the rest of the voyage home. I dare say you thought me very cold when I told you the truth. I was really so miserably ashamed of the way you had been treated, you darling little pet, that I could hardly look you in the face."

"No, oh, no! It was you who were badly treated; but still, you have not said why you came back to-day."

He did not reply at once.

"I have been trying to find an answer, my child, and I cannot; don't you believe in instinct, Gertrude? I do. Well, my first instinct came when old Mathieu said you had worn mourning for me, and he supposed you would be well now I had come back; then other little things came to me on my way back to Paris. Perhaps, after all, it was a little look in your own dear eyes that kept on whispering, 'Go back, go back,' so loudly; I wonder if the look meant that?"

"I shall never tell you; but are you sure the abbé said nothing?"

"Nothing. He seemed completely absorbed in the return of his pupil—the only thing he said which might have given me hope was that he wished I had staid longer at Château-Fontaine; are you satisfied now?"

"Not nearly—you must tell me ever so much more; but there is no more time now."

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As I hurry across the garden, it seems to me that we shall never get time to say all we must say to one another. Will he ever tell me, I wonder, the whole story of his love from the beginning?

I ran up the corkscrew staircase; Rosalie opened the door by which it led on to the gallery, and for once I felt loving to Rosalie.

"Where is madame, Rosalie?"

"Madame is in her bedroom; but mademoiselle cannot go to her, she is very busy with the Mère Angélique."

"So much the better," I said, as I tapped at the door.

I believe Rosalie was beginning to interfere, but Angélique opened the door; and, when Rosalie saw me clinging round her mother's neck—I suppose the sight was too much for her—she retreated at once.

When I had kissed Angélique, I took shelter in Madame La Peyre's arms—stretched out fondly toward me—but instead of telling my joy, to my own great surprise, I began to cry, and it was some time before I could calm myself.

Madame cried too, for sympathy, and I saw Angélique rub those bony knuckles across her eyes; but she was the most self-possessed of the three.

"Then mademoiselle is happy at last?"

"Yes, you dear old thing, so happy that I don't know what to do, and your words have come true, after all. To-day I found my happiness when I only went to find the boat."

"My child," said madame, softly — she kept on petting now my hands, now my hair, now giving me soft kisses, in her overflow of sympathy—"tell me, will the captain take thee away from us, or will he leave thee here when he goes to sea?"

"When he goes to sea!"—an undreamed-of horror seems to chill my blood—"O madame, if he ever leaves me to go to sea again, I shall die!"

But I have never been so tried. My darling husband has given up the sea, and he has not taken me away entirely from my beloved French friends. . . .

We have spent every summer at Château-Fontaine, and Angélique and Madame La Peyre have vied with each other in spoiling "the young captain," as they call our eldest boy; the abbé takes possession of his little sister, and, I fancy, gets completely tyrannized over by that young damsel, who has developed a rare spirit of coquetry at three years old. When she tires of the abbé, she takes refuge with Mr. Dayrell, who is often at Château-Fontaine. When we went there with our first baby, I, still cherishing a belief in the tragic possibilities of Rosalie's character, had an uneasy fear lest she should do the child a mischief simply because it was mine; but time has cured this fear, and I see that the story of the "green-eyed, yellow-lashed woman" gave me, at first sight, an exaggerated estimate of this poor, half-witted creature.

Berthe is broader than ever, and, I fear, she is almost as dull; but she is always good and loving. I believe the abbé would like us to live always at Château-Fontaine; but he has promised some day to accompany Madame La Peyre and Angélique in one of the visits they sometimes pay us in our English home.

And, now, what more can I add? There is no use in describing happiness like ours. I love my friends so dearly that, in spite of the keen pain much of this record has given me, as bit by bit I have put it together, I find it hard to leave off. The occupation of so many months and years has become very dear and engrossing, a part of my life that I feel bereaved without; only a doubt steals over me whether I have been able to picture forth in any true shape the husband who now forms the whole of my life, the hero of my story. . . .

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THE END.

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